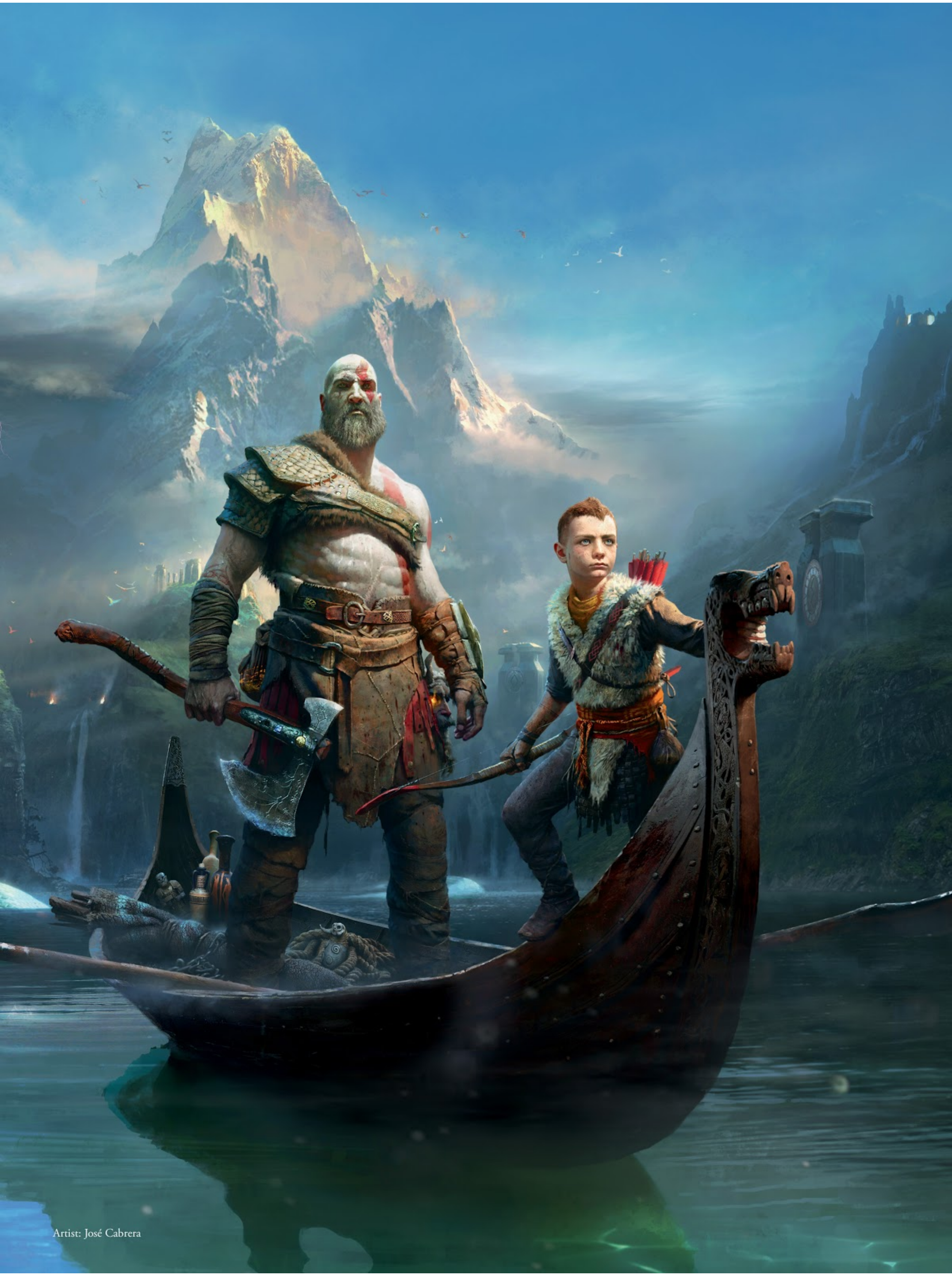
THE ART OF
GOD OF WAR®



Artist: José Cabrera

THE ART OF GOD OF WAR®

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Special thanks to Aaron Kaufman and John Wie at Santa Monica Studio, and Nick McWhorter, Kari Yadro, and Tina Alessi at Dark Horse Comics.

THE ART OF GOD OF WAR

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Published by Dark Horse Books
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

DarkHorse.com
SMS.PlayStation.com
PlayStation.com

Facebook.com/DarkHorseComics Twitter.com/DarkHorseComics

Advertising Sales: (503) 905-2537
International Licensing: (503) 905-2377
Comic Shop Locator Service: (888) 266-4226

First edition: March 2018
Digital ISBN 978-1-50670-760-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017950804

FOREWORD BY CORY BARLOG 6
INTRODUCTION 8
I PRE-PRODUCTION 11
II FIRST PLAYABLE 47
III OPENING UP THE WORLD 71
IV PRODUCTION 125

Artist: Mark Castanon

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Artist: Vance Kovacs (top, opposite)

FOREWORD

Video Games are art.

By that, I mean they are both individual artistic statements as well as a medium reliant on the use of visuals for storytelling. Sure, there are text-based games here and there, but, for the most part, the games we consume *today* are highly visual. Because of this, the visuals of your game are usually the first impression a prospective player has. A giant welcome mat, if you will, that beckons every player into this world you have worked so hard to create, and inviting them to take part in the experience you have worked so hard to craft.

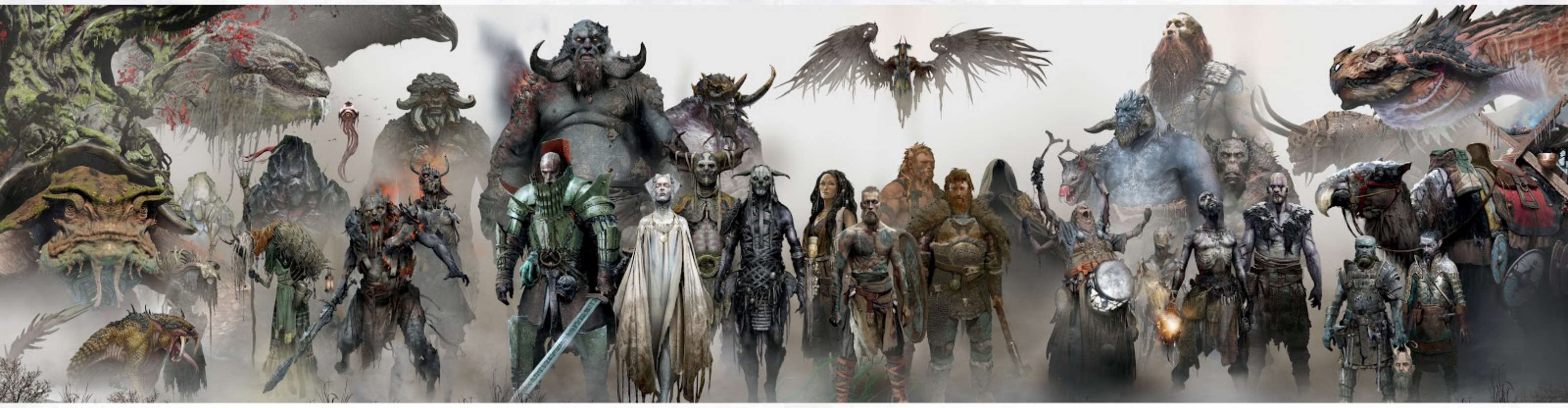
When you have the right people, artists who possess an almost magical ability to transform words and thoughts into tangible visual realities that feel both fantastic and real, then achieving that goal is so much easier. It's not easy, by any stretch, but the circuitous winding path of game development is slightly more illuminated thanks to their talents.

Making this game has been one of the most difficult, most personal development experiences of my career. Bringing the worlds and characters to life with the artists whose work fills the pages of this book has been incredibly rewarding and has changed me, as a director, for the better. I think the journey we take as a team when making a game is almost as interesting as the game itself. There are seemingly impossible mountains to climb, monster schedules to slay, delicate juggling of family and work lives, passionate arguments, great victories, and crushing defeats. But through all of this, it is the steady stream of stunning imagery created by all the artists on this team that inspires and drives the rest of us to work into the night bringing this world to life. To make this world tangible, fantastic, and real.

So, to all of you for whom we made this game . . .

Welcome.

Cory Barlog
Creative Director, Santa Monica Studio



INTRODUCTION

Back when the idea for a new *God of War* title was first batted around in early 2013, a small incubation team inside Sony's Santa Monica Studio was tasked with rebooting the studio's seminal franchise. Early on, creative director Cory Barlog was brought on to help a group of roughly a dozen developers bring the game to life; having served as the lead animator on the original *God of War*, and game director on *God of War II* and parts of *God of War III*, Barlog was intimately familiar with the source material.

The project quickly began to reflect the personal lives of its creators. Barlog and other developers on the nascent team had recently had children, and conversations began around the notion of Kratos becoming a father, and what drama such a scenario might entail. Where Kratos had previously been something of a one-note protagonist, the team came to recognize how his entrance into fatherhood might serve as an organic way to add more emotional depth to his character. It also represented an opportunity for Barlog to employ the faithful adage of "write what you know," extrapolating his own recent experience of becoming a dad, and exploring how such an experience might intersect with Kratos' own worldview.

Barlog tasked himself and two of the writers on the project to write short stories that would help define the tone of the world for the new game. Barlog's own story revolved around the father and son going hunting; one writer worked on the first appearance of a major Norse god; and the other writer wrote a story about the son being afraid of the water and the process of learning to swim. The goal was to establish how the world felt, and to then use that as a springboard for the rest of the project.

Indeed, while Kratos had technically been a father in previous titles, he was always trying to escape from that role. The driving force behind his motivational shift in the new *God of War* is the passing of the child's mother, which takes place just prior to the start of the adventure. Through this event, Kratos is finally forced to fully embrace fatherhood, which brings with it a level of intimacy that spreads across everything, writ large: the environment and how it's depicted on screen, to the camera, the relationships, the weapons—even the enemies and how the player fights them. In contrast to the more global perspective of *God of War* titles past, everything in the new game became more up-close and familiar.

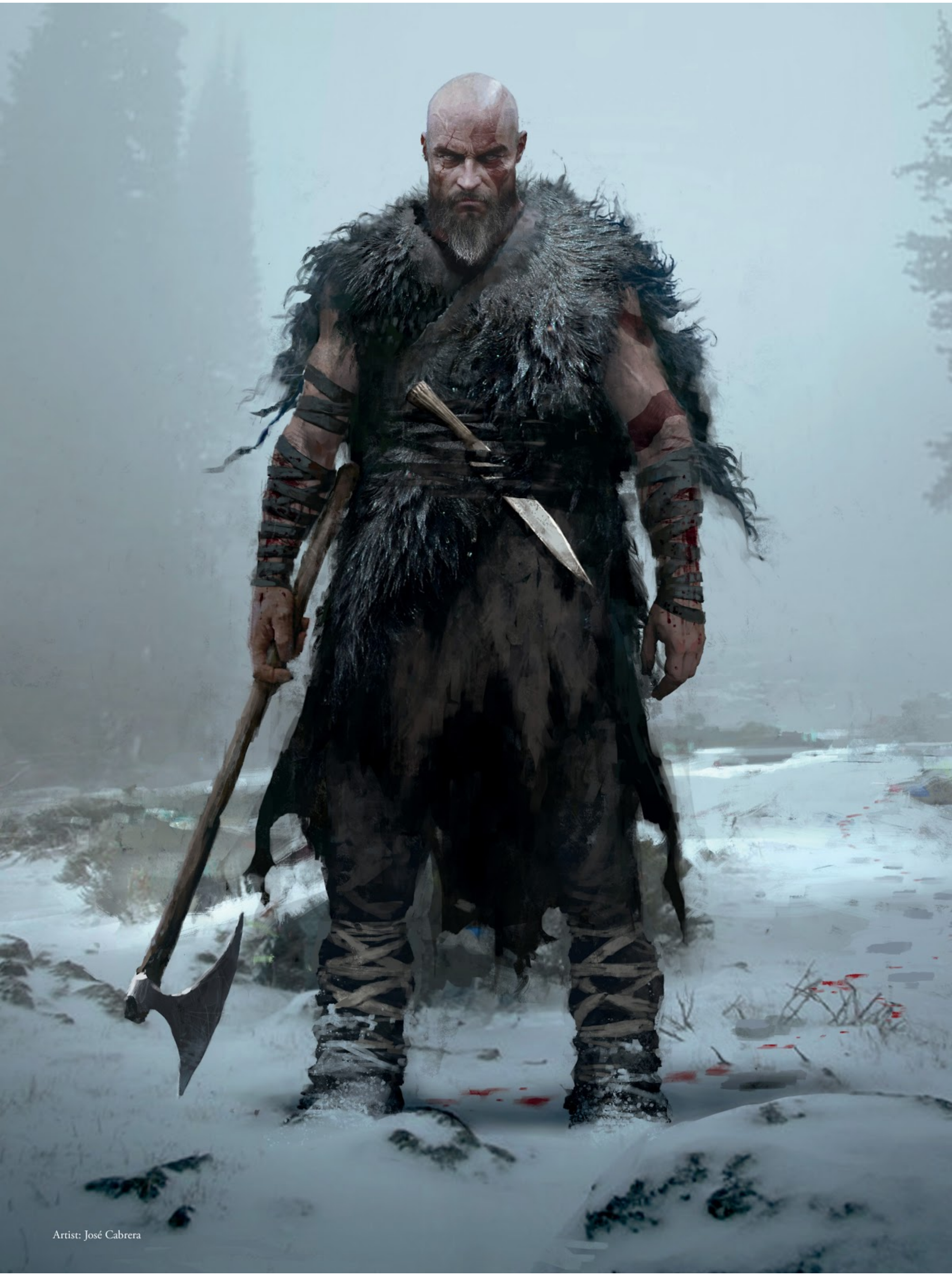
Another formative change to the new title comes in the form of the world itself, which eschews the franchise's primary inspiration of Greek mythology in favor of something more diverse and enigmatic. Because the Greeks were so successful in terms of their architecture and dress on the culture, its designs pervade much of contemporary western culture; to this day you can find examples of Greco-Roman architecture everywhere—in the US capital, for instance.

When the team found itself gravitating to Norse mythology for the new game, it quickly became clear that this road was one far less travelled. The team's focus on pre-Viking culture—when it was believed that the gods roamed all the realms and Midgard—simply didn't have much by way of precedent, which meant producing source material entailed a rather deep dive into the creative minds of the artists.

Norse culture is very poorly documented, so when the artists would dig for reference, they found relatively little to work with. This meant finding unique, creative angles from which to explore this very small pool of images. For instance, a single small jewelry box might need to serve as inspiration for an entire level in the game. It was something the team hadn't necessarily had to do on previous projects; when given reams of reference from which to work, an artist isn't forced to think in this way. It became one of the great challenges of this project—to examine reference essentially, and treat it in a very different way.

The dearth of reference material meant that the team found itself drawing inspiration from other sources such as Celtic ruins and Indian temples to expand beyond the iconic longhouse and horned helmet to craft its world—one that felt unique and fresh, yet still grounded enough to be believable. As a result, the team was constantly flexing their creative muscles to bring these details to the surface, infusing the game with a constant stream of fresh new ideas.

This is but one of the many challenges the team faced in bringing this new iteration of *God of War* to life. This book is designed to take readers on a chronological journey through the completion of the game as it happened; creating *God of War* was an evolving process from idea to final concepts, and we're sharing as much as possible to illustrate what that process looked like from the inside, including the stuff that ultimately didn't make the final cut. As we'll explore in the coming pages, the creative process—especially for a venerated franchise looking to reinvent itself—can be a long and winding road.



Artist: José Cabrera

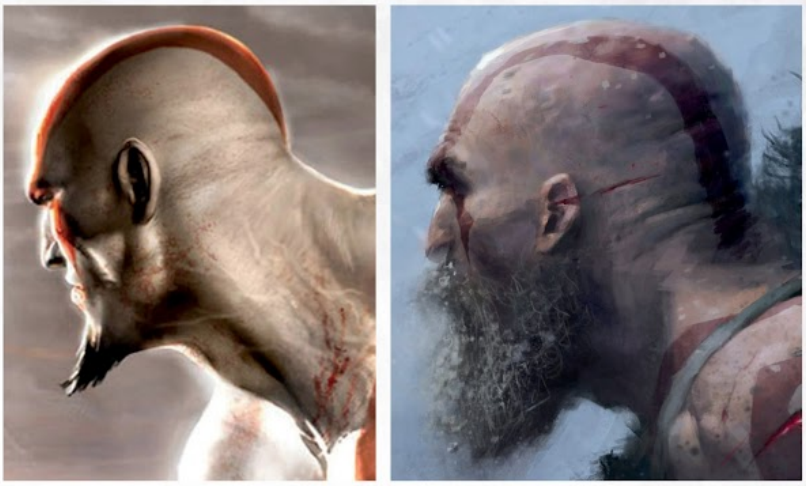
I

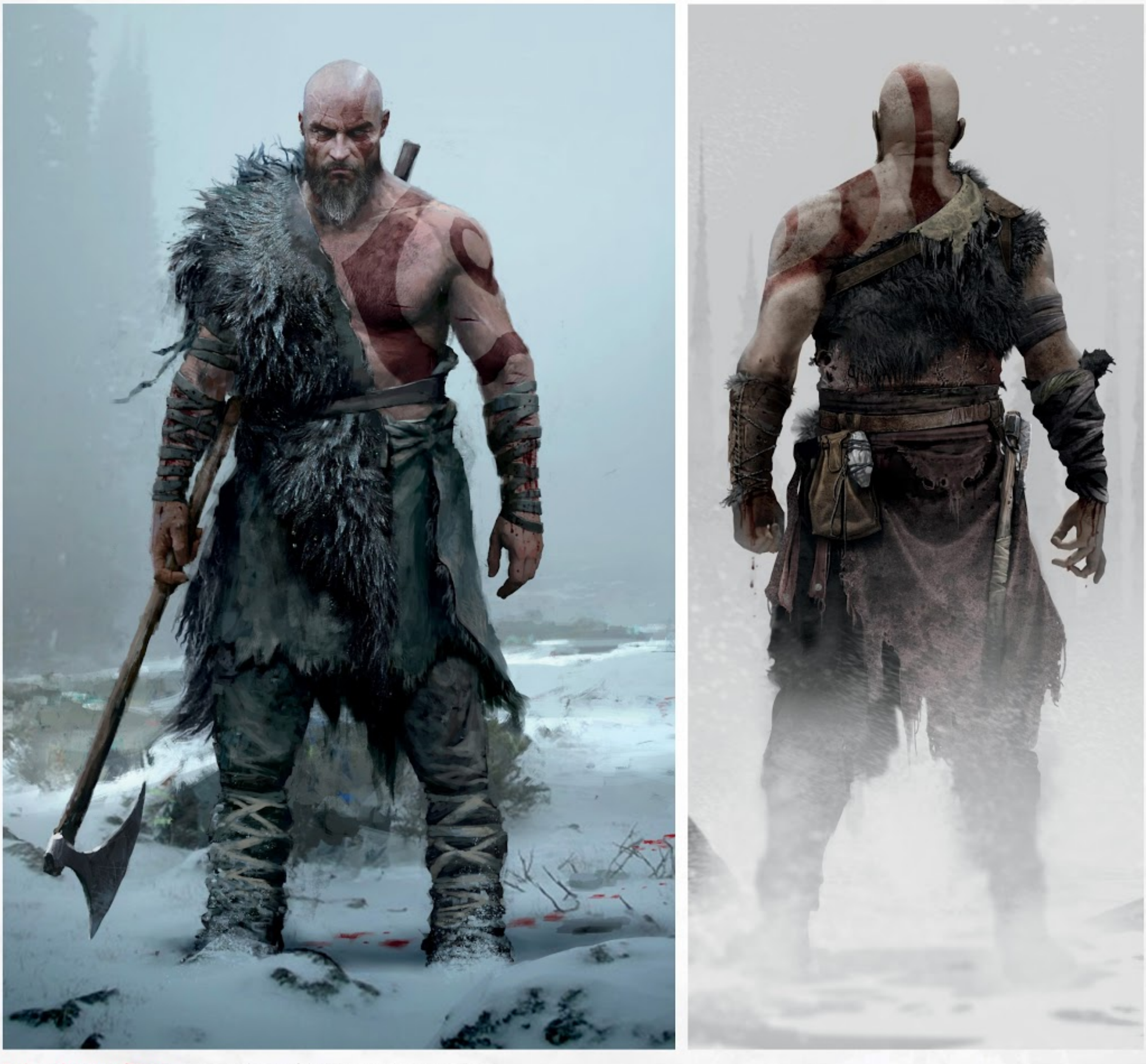
PRE-PRODUCTION

From the very start of development, the team knew it wanted to take the new *God of War* game in a different visual direction. "The old *God of War* art direction came to be described as '*Heavy Metal* magazine meets Greek mythology,' and that had really given us something unique for a long time," said Luke Berliner. The team often looked back at the style of the early games as the franchise's "comic period"—big, mean, and over-the-top. What would happen, they wondered, if the approach became more cinematic and a bit more gritty, but still maintain those same ideas?

With those kinds of conversations happening, the team had to figure out just how grounded they wanted the new game to be. "We knew we wanted to lean a lot more on historical detail, but we also wanted to make a world that was clearly pre-Viking," said Berliner. "This was before man had really settled and when gods, giants, and monsters roamed the land—the period when the myth was really being made."

Of course, one of the most involved character designs for *God of War* was the new look of Kratos. Getting this character right meant a lot to the team, all of whom wanted to strike a balance of retaining the iconic elements of his design while bringing fresh ideas from the Norse world to the table also. "People have expectations for what he's supposed to look like," said lead character artist Rafael Grassetti. "It was kinda hard to push people to like a completely new design, but once we started just enhancing what was there before, it was a little easier to get people onboard."





Early exploration of Kratos. Artists: Dela Longfish (bottom right); José Cabrera

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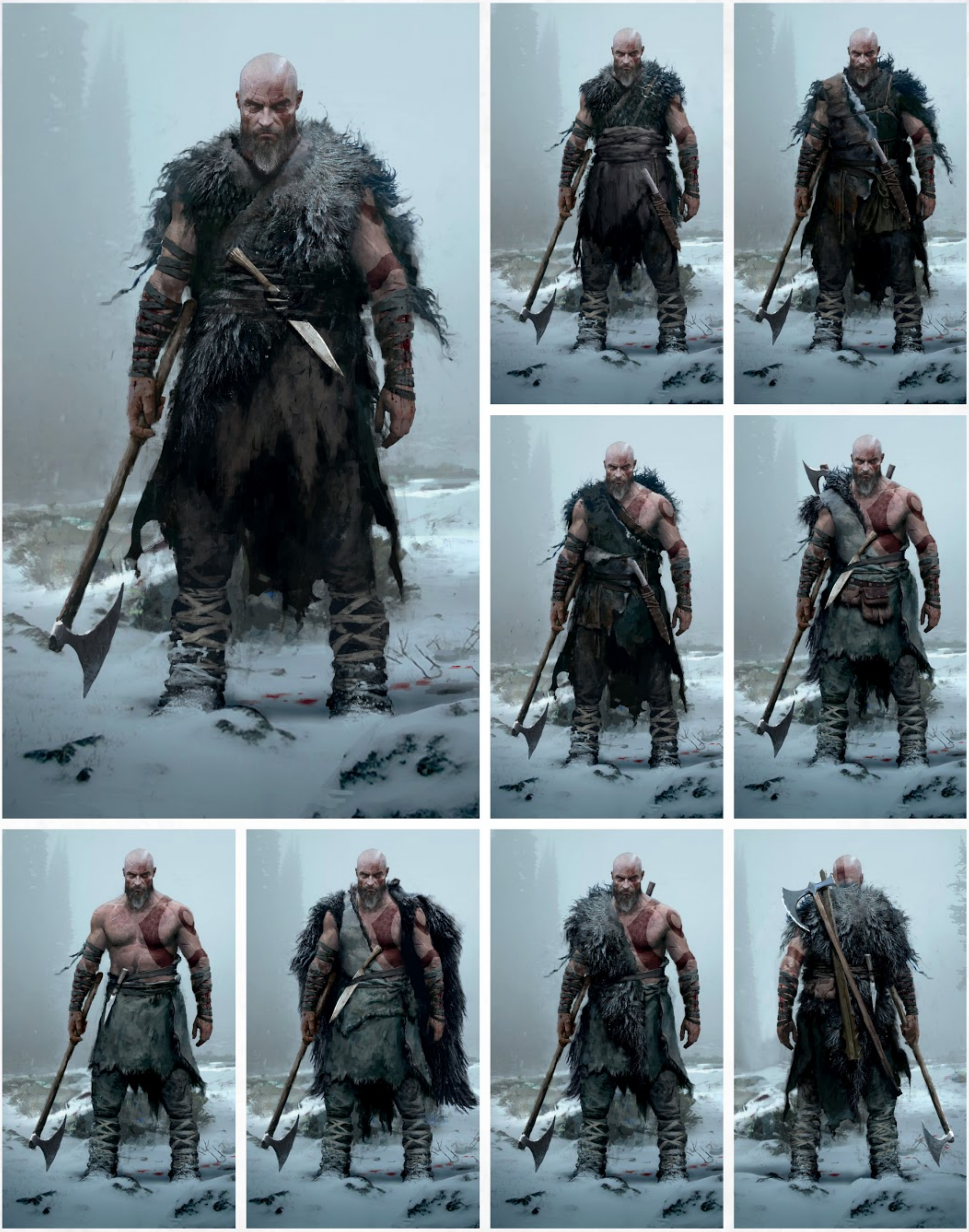
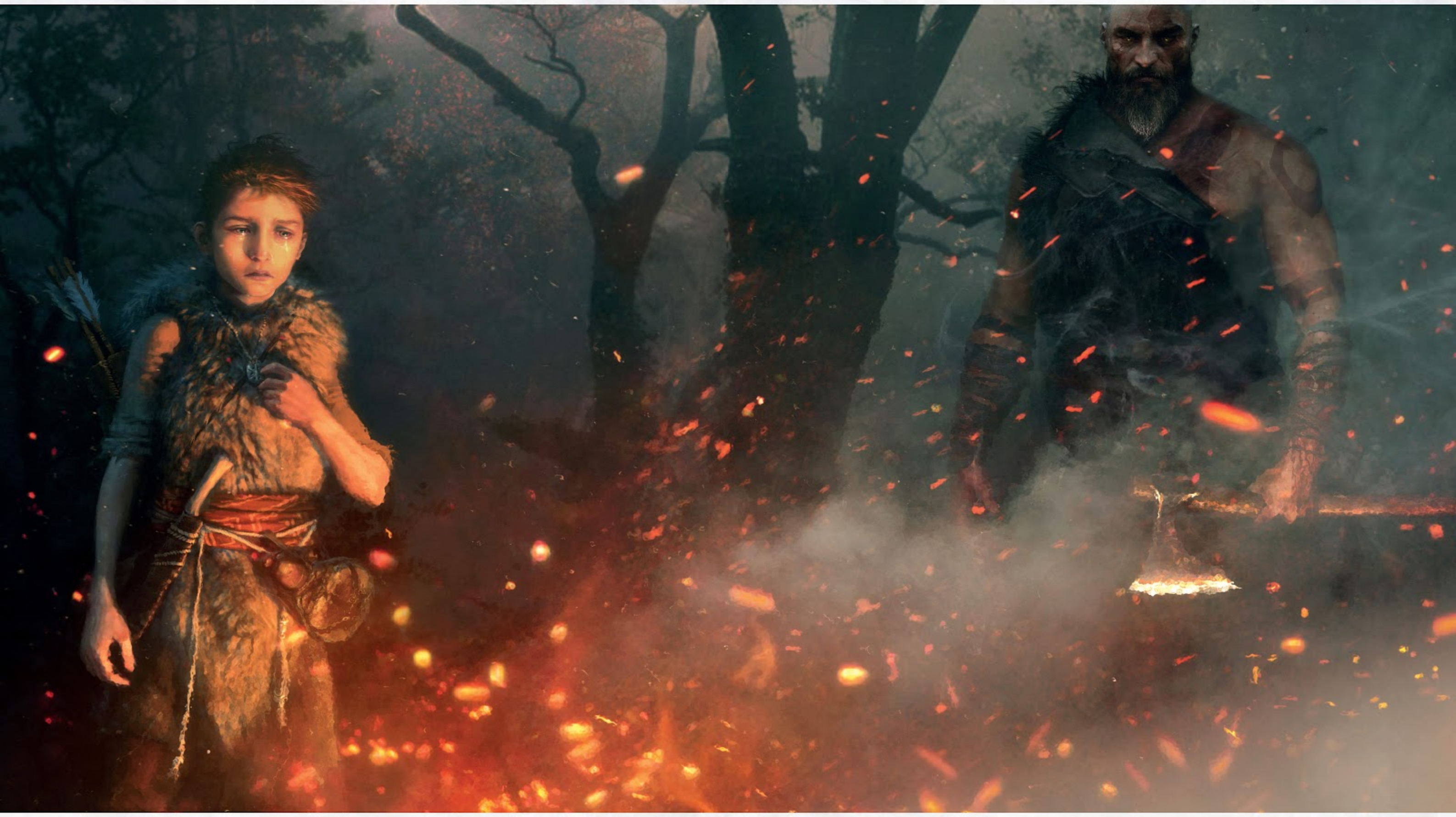
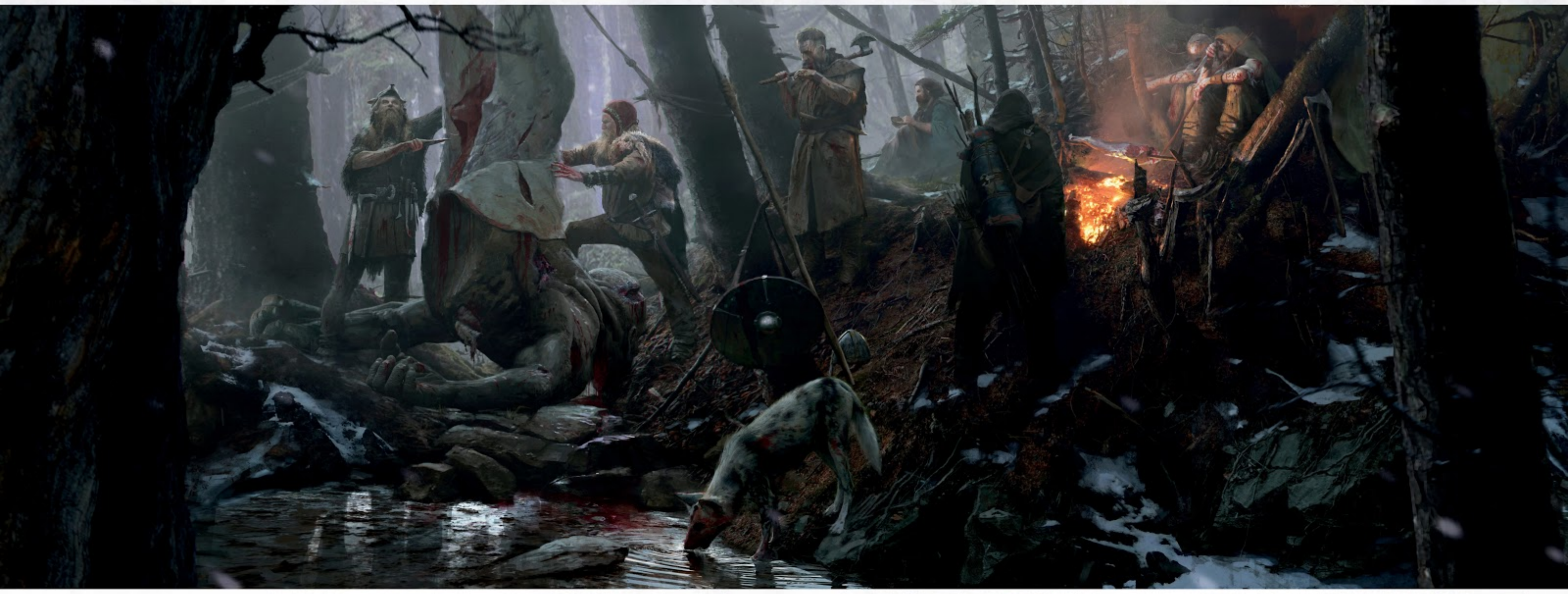


Artist: José Cabrera

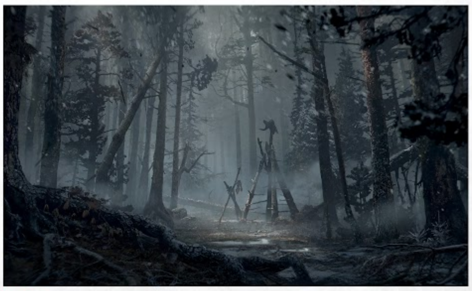


Artist: José Cabrera

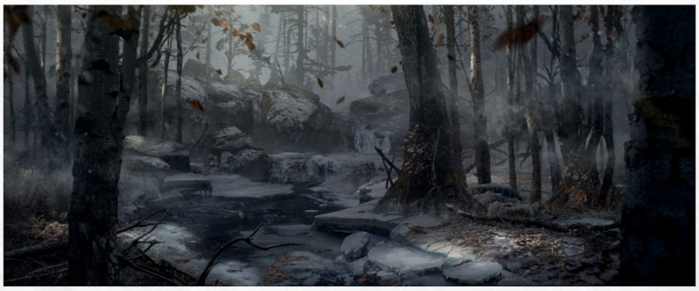


When the team asked Spanish concept artist José Cabrera to design some Nomads for them, they expected to get some guys standing on a gray background, perhaps with a bit of snow on the ground. What they got, however, was an evocative image of the Nomads skinning a troll; the image was so compelling that the 3-D artists started recreating it, and it eventually ended up in the 2016 *God of War* E3 trailer.

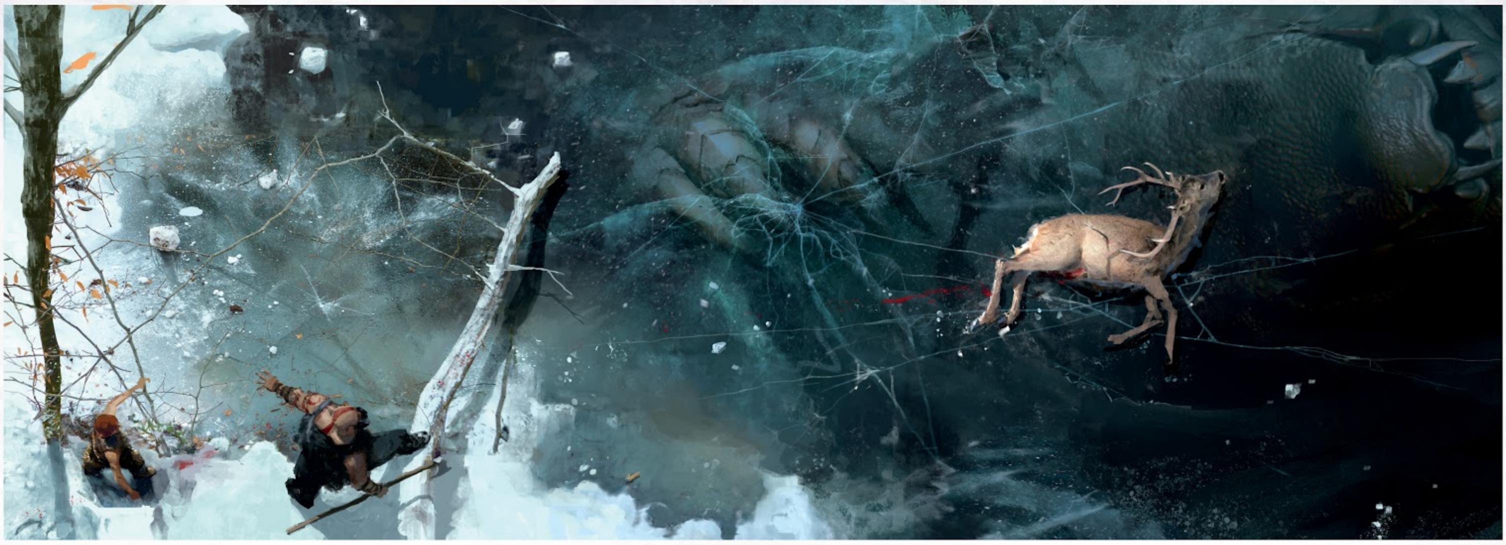
"I think José had a sensibility for this type of work," said senior concept artist Mark Castanon. "This game is much more rough and realistic than the original *God of War* game, and I think José brought a very analytical approach—in the lighting, the amount of detail, and the color palette he used in a lot of his paintings."



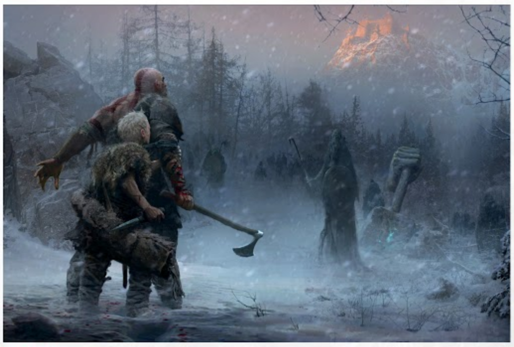
Troll hunt. Artists: José Cabrera (top); Cliff Childs (bottom)



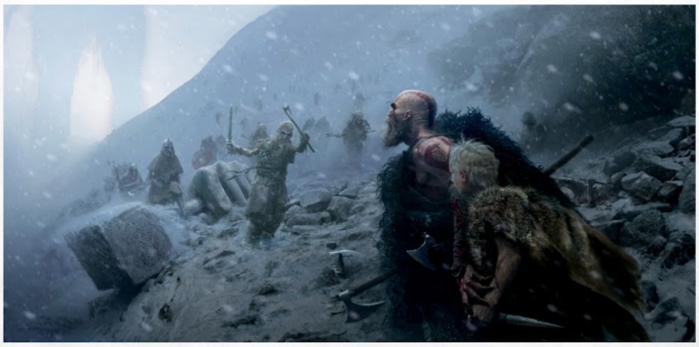
Midgard forest. Artist: Cliff Childs (bottom)



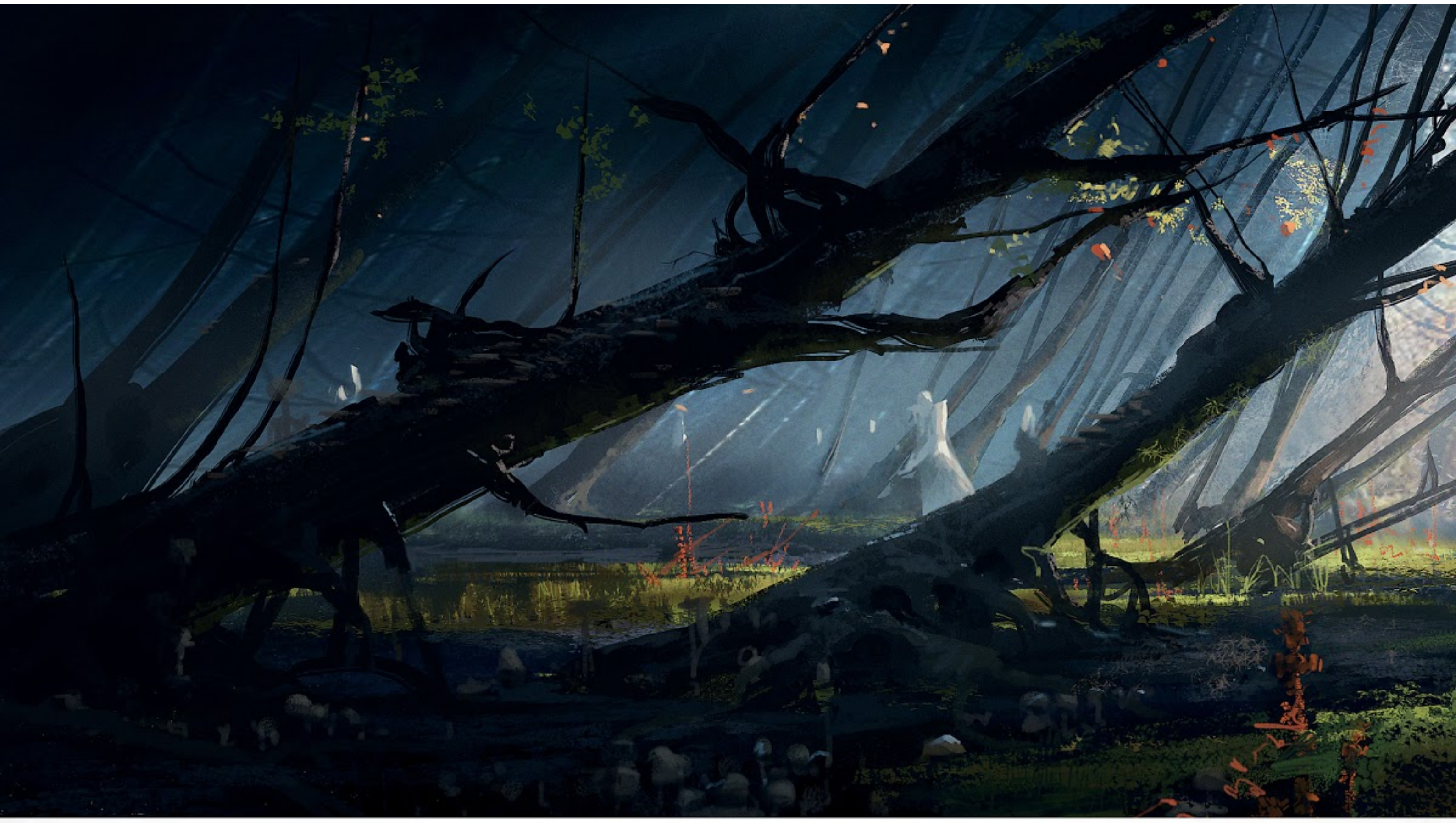
At the very start of any project, we often try to create a handful of key images or references that the team can rally behind. Most of the time, it takes a number of paintings to cobble together something that gets close to the mood—and even that can often evolve over time. Sometimes, however, you get lucky, and nail it on the first shot; such was the case when these paintings (and those on the following spread) started coming in from concept artist José Cabrera. "We collectively all picked our jaws up off the floor and said, 'that's the game . . . this is the direction we should go in,' and that never really changed," said Luke Berliner.

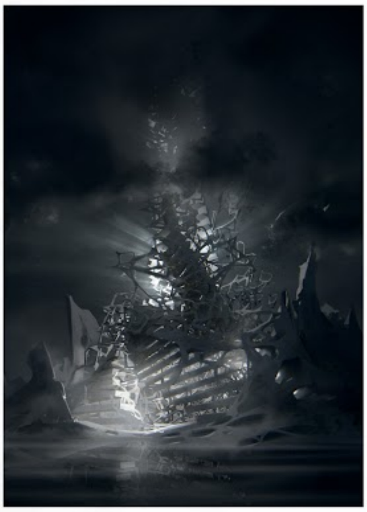


First Norse concepts. Artist: José Cabrera

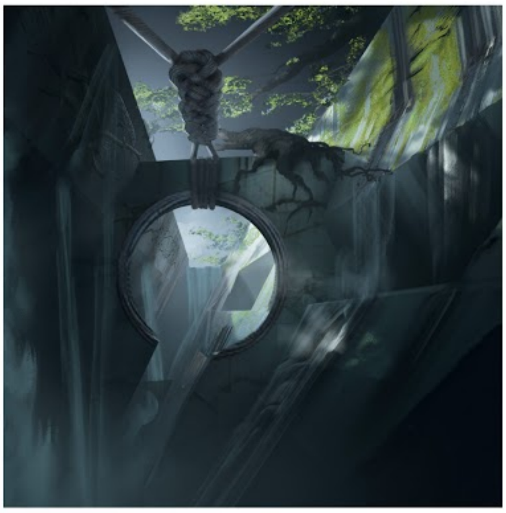


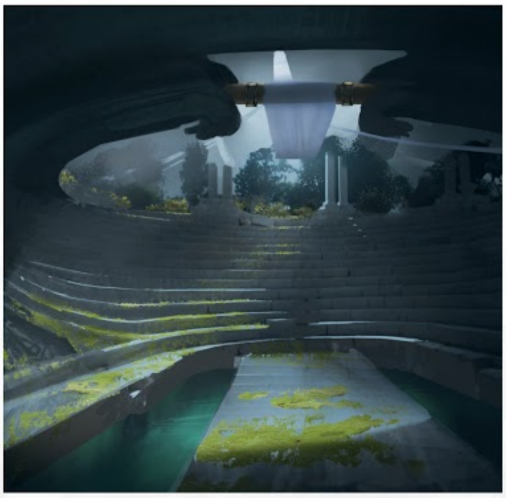
Artist: José Cabrera

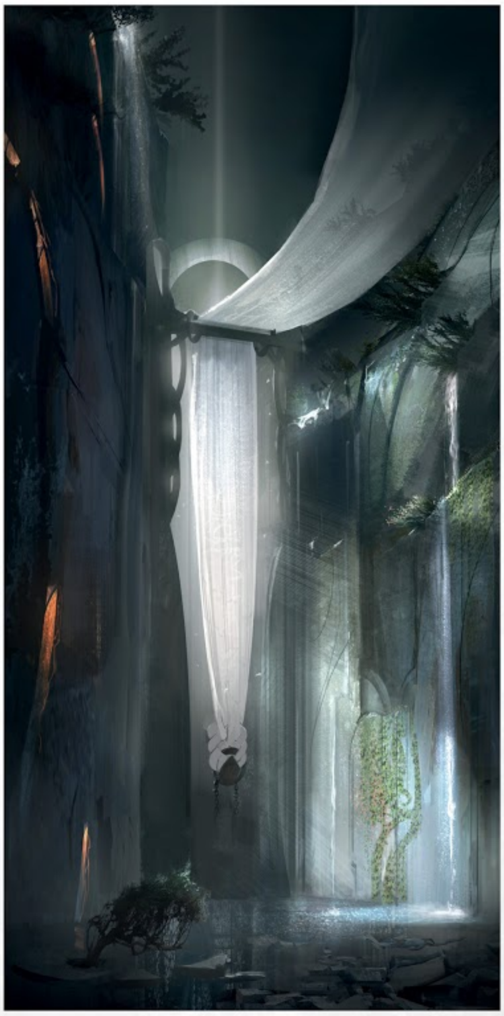




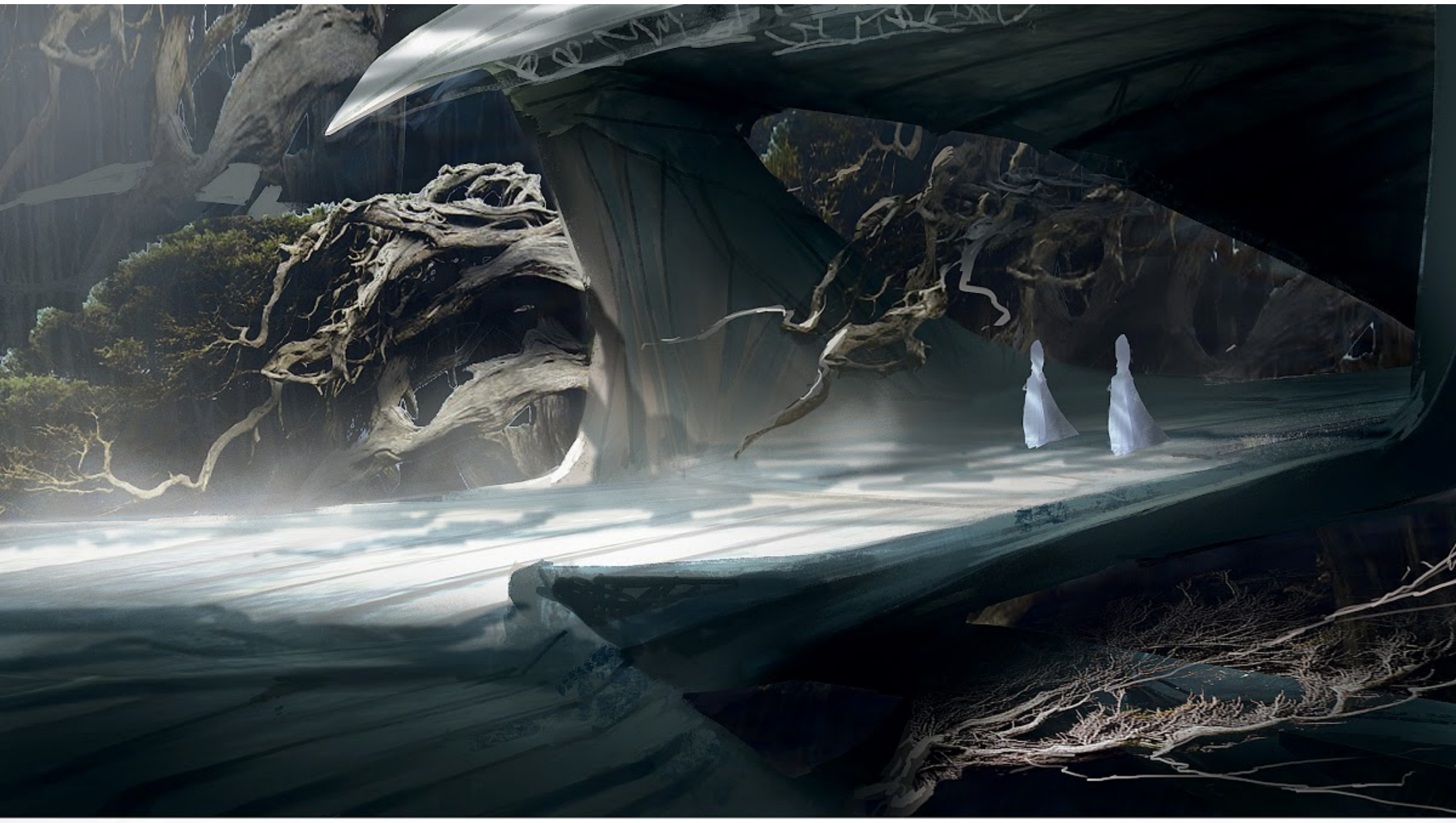
From the start, the team knew that the game's Álfheim level was going to be lit solely from the Temple of Light at the center of the level. But what would a forest look like if it had grown for thousands of years in those lighting conditions? The team imagined that the trees would bend and twist toward the light, each flower and leaf stretching toward the temple. The shadows, therefore, would never see light, creating a life-or-death contrast that the team explored throughout the level.

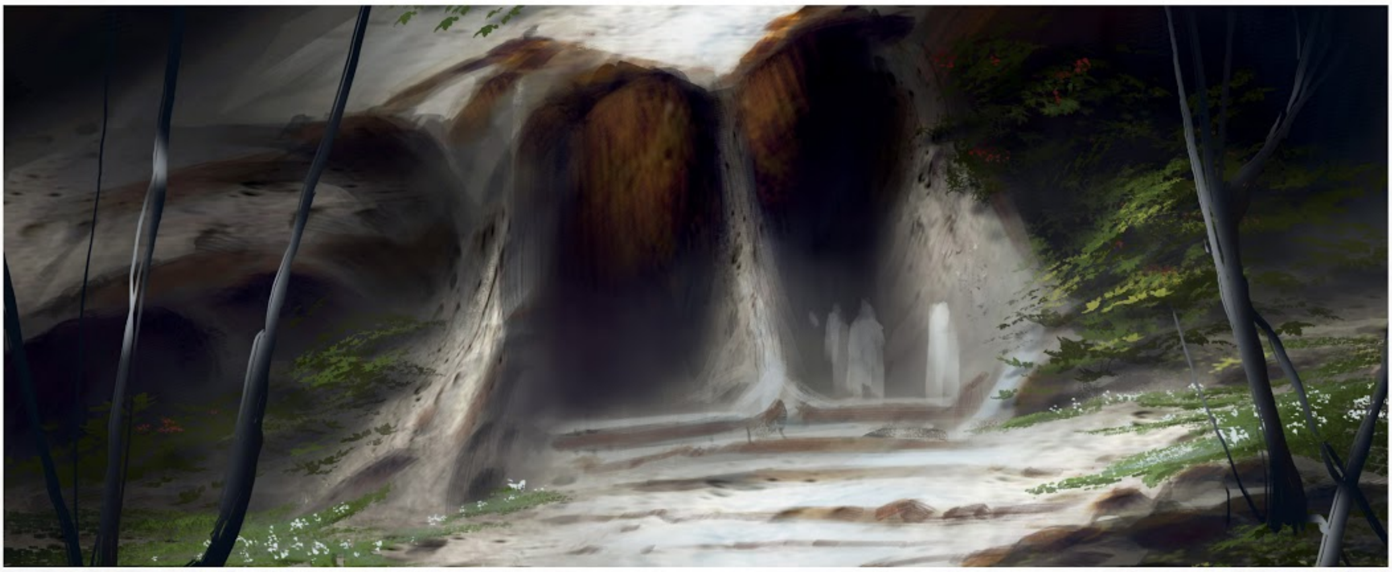


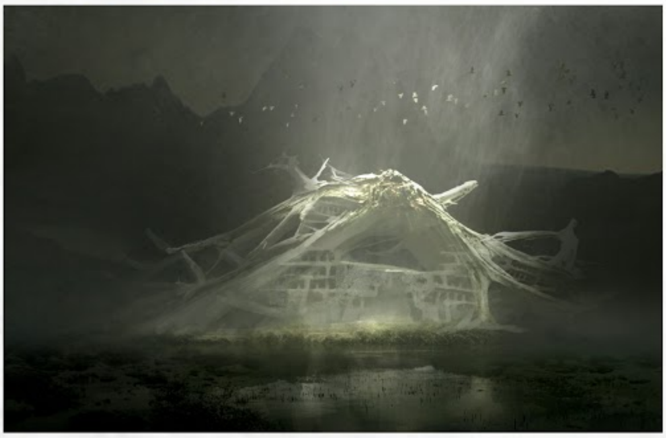


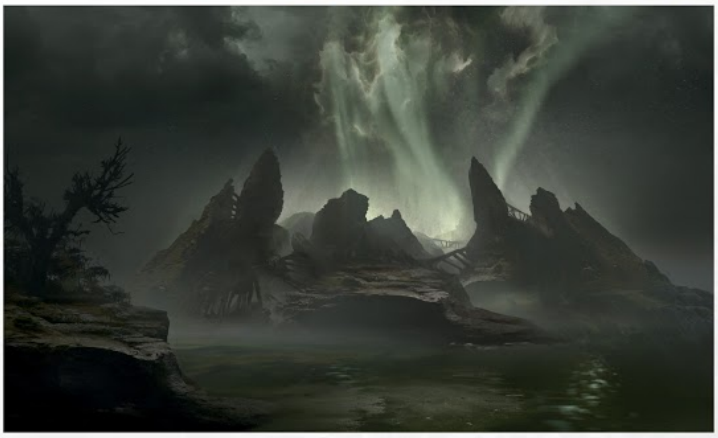


Exploring Álfheim. Artists: Section Studios (bottom right); Luke Berliner

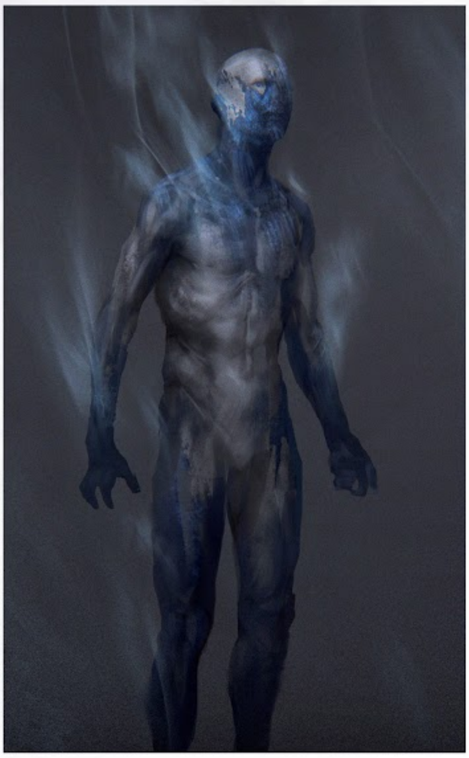


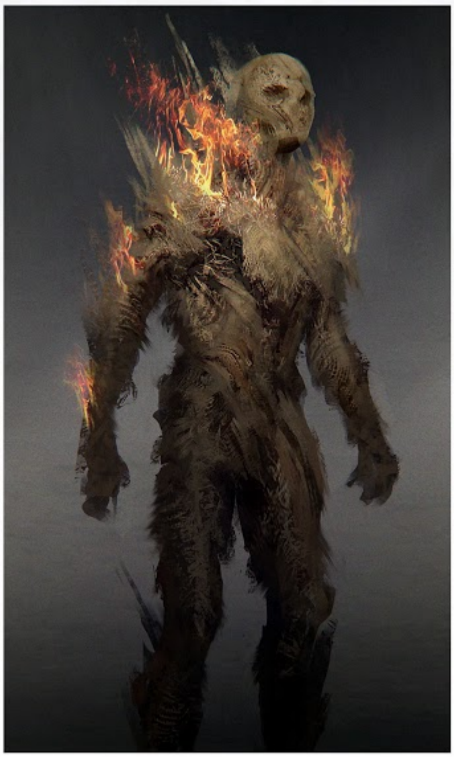


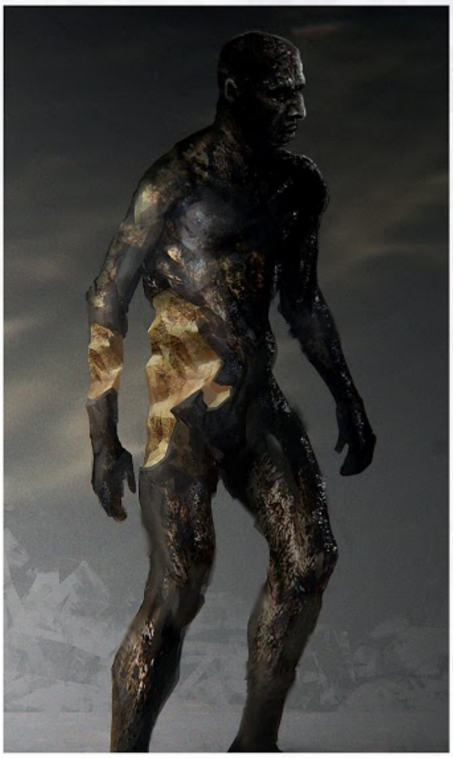


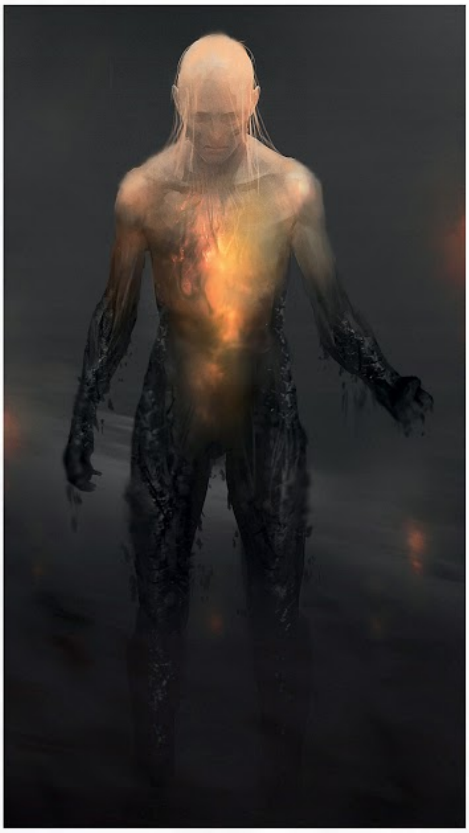


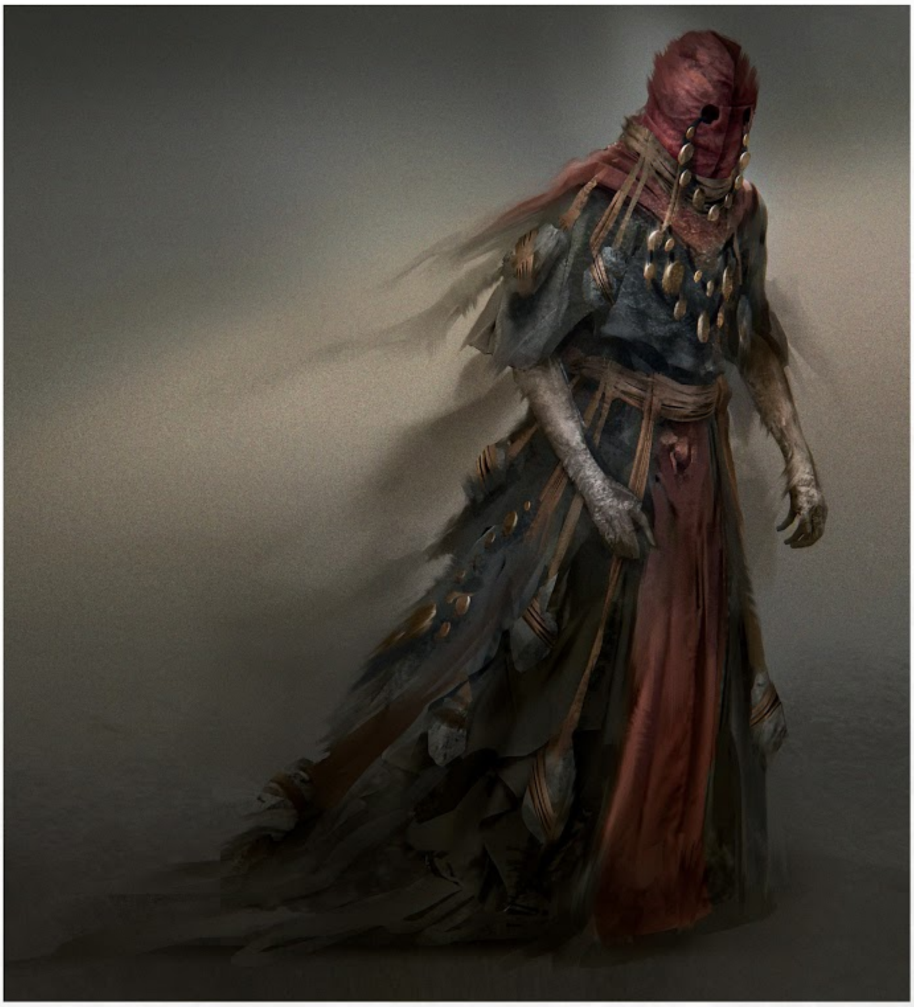
Artists: Luke Berliner (top, middle); Cliff Childs





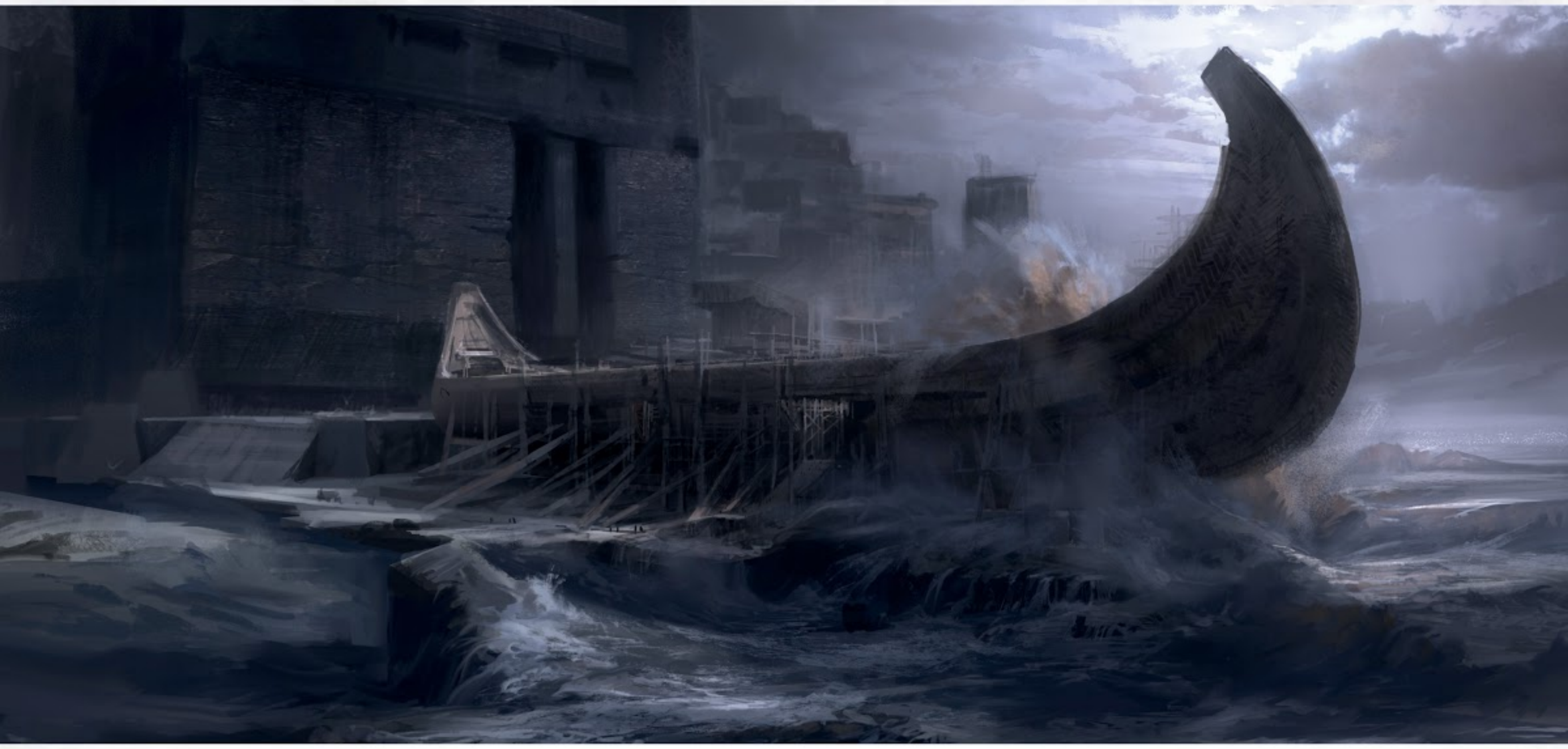


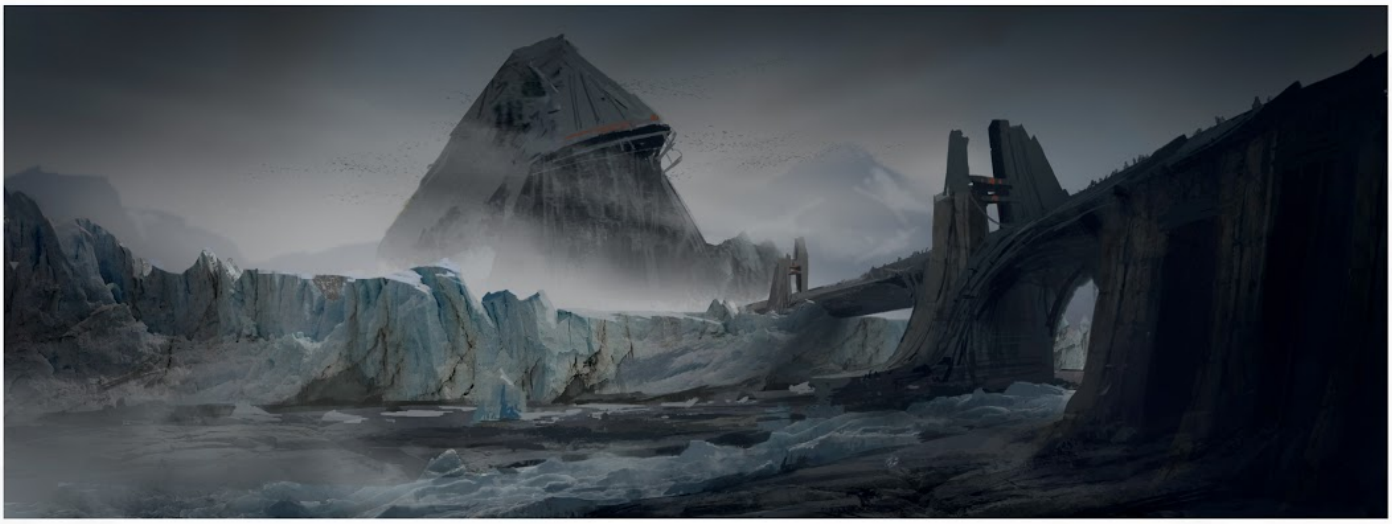


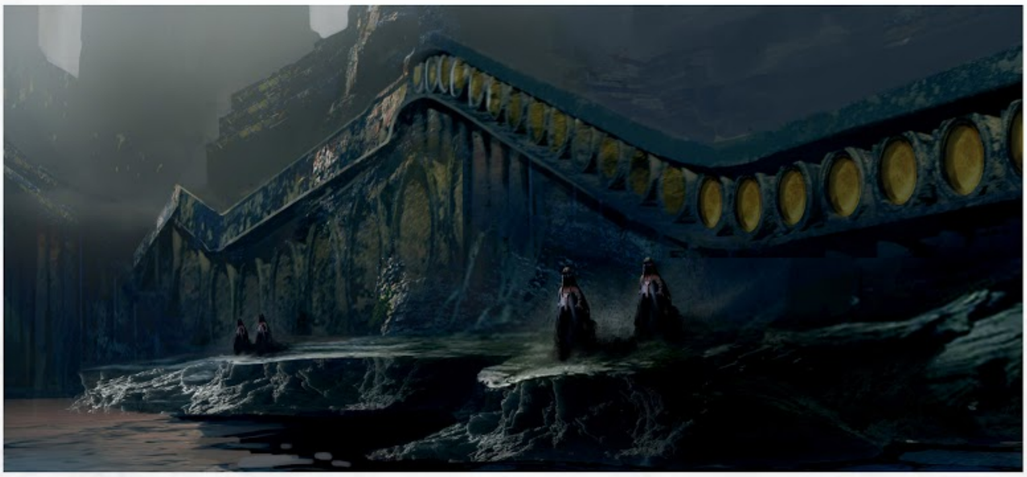


As the team was exploring the look of characters in the game, concept artist Yefim Kligerman created these evocative concepts for what the dead of Helheim might look like, some of which made it into the final game.

Inhabitants of Helheim. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

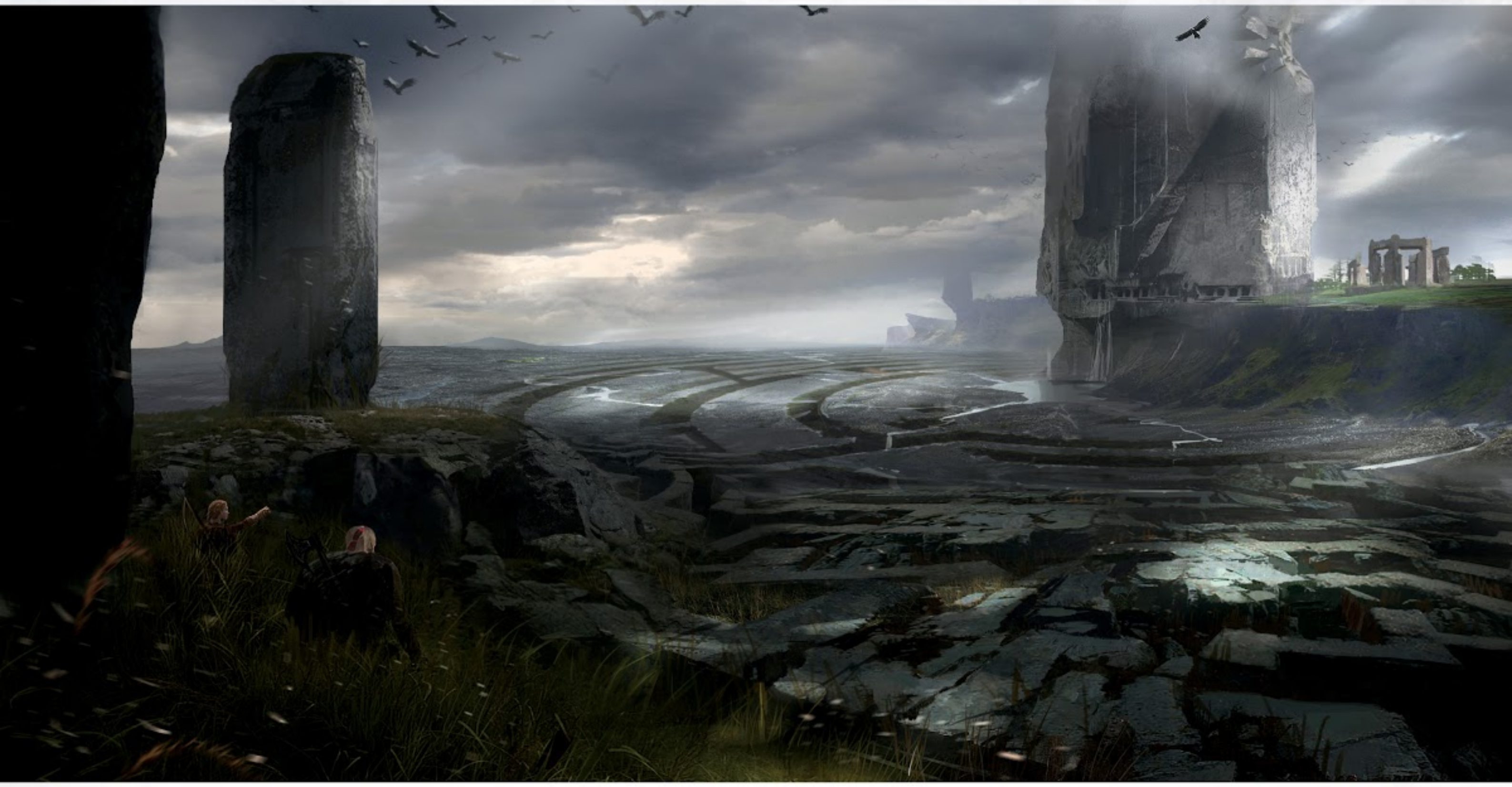






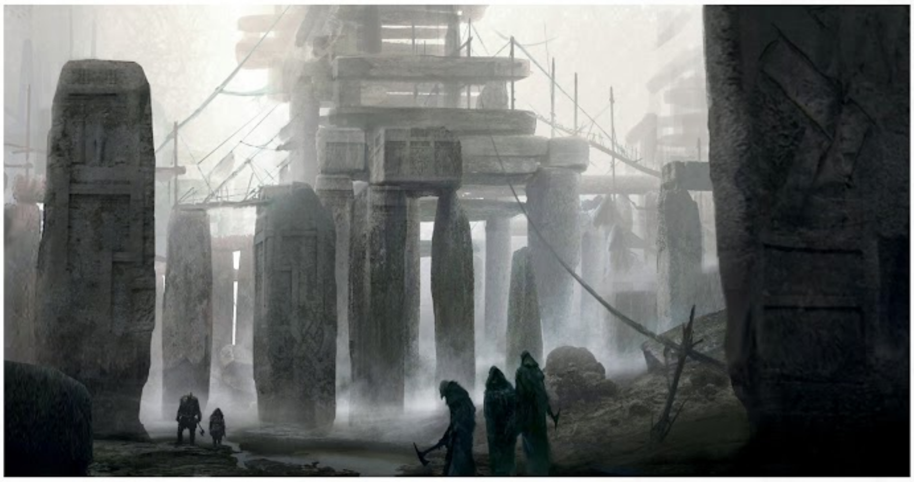
In the mythology, the dead journey over the River of Knives as they make their way into Helheim proper; when the team looked at glacial flows and melts, they noticed that they often looked like knives, with harsh, serrated edges. These illustrations also speak to a city whose sole purpose was to arm an undead army, and build the massive ship of the dead for Ragnarok.

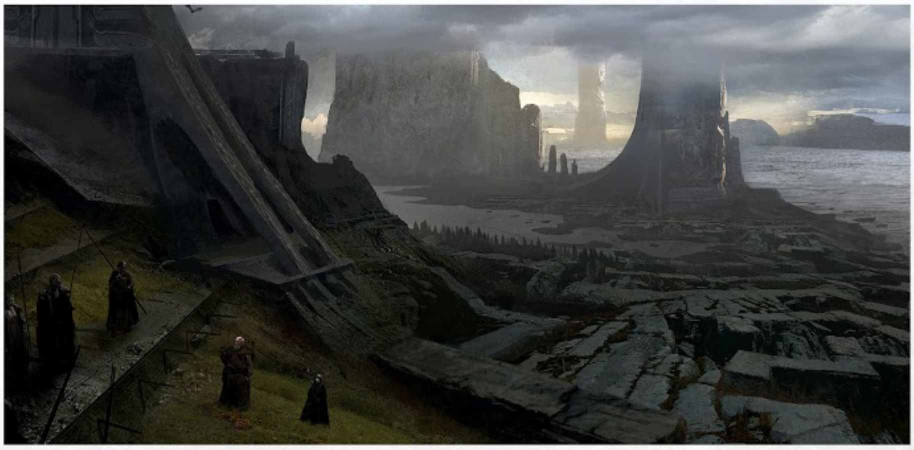
The endless wastelands of Helheim. Artists: Jung Ho Park (bottom); Luke Berliner



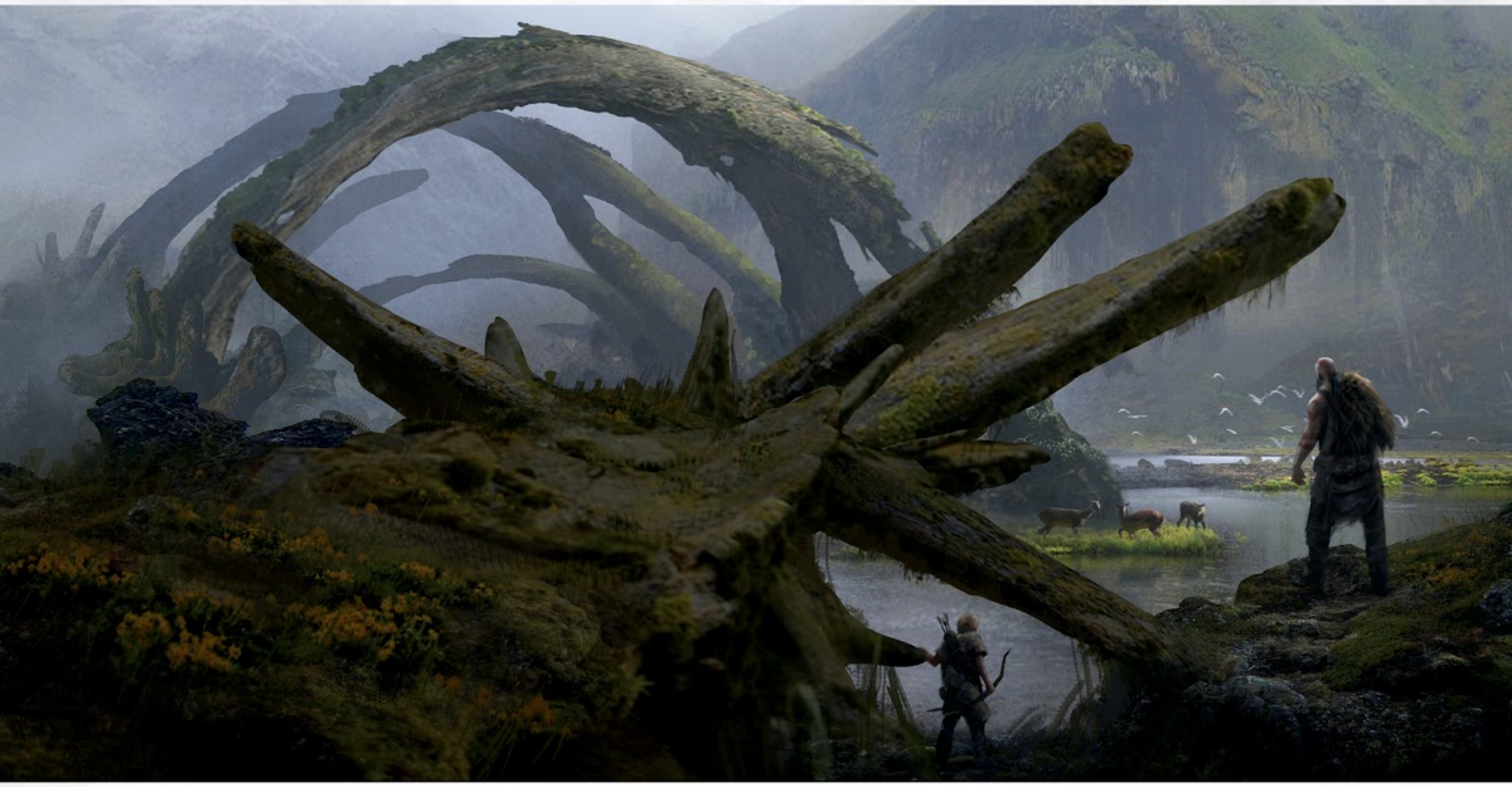
Early on, the team played quite a bit with abstract, minimalist architecture, trying to find a balance between organic and intentional design. Many of the large stone temples and ruins you see in the game were built by the giants who had long left Midgard. "We imagined their building was very much opportunistic, into the sides of mountains or where there was massive stone already waiting to be shaped," said lead environment artist John Palamarchuk.

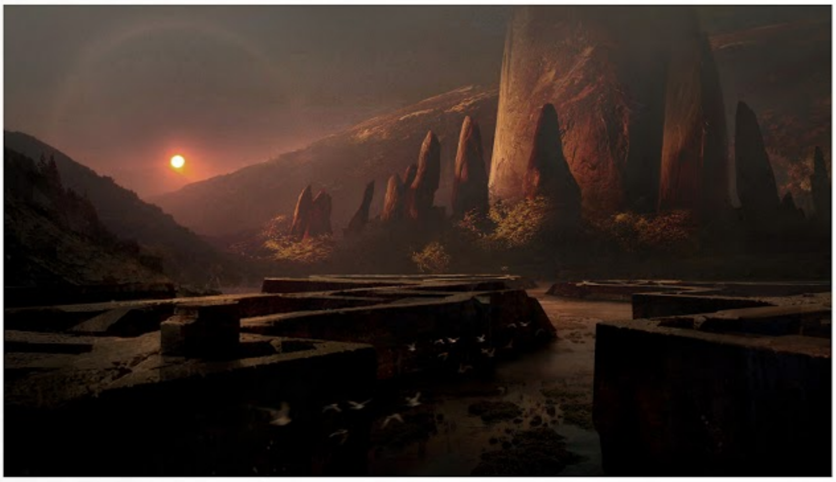
"It was interesting, because starting out, there was this desire to be ultra-minimal—minimalism was the thing," said Luke Berliner, who remembers being in the early meetings where the team didn't even want any metal on the characters. "It was a really long road of exploring—early on, I think it was much more gritty and real, and super dark." Indeed, the initial pitch for the game was: "What if mythology was a little bit more real? What if gods would appear in the form of, for instance, a shadow in the woods running past the player, or other manifestations that were smaller in scale than what we're used to?"

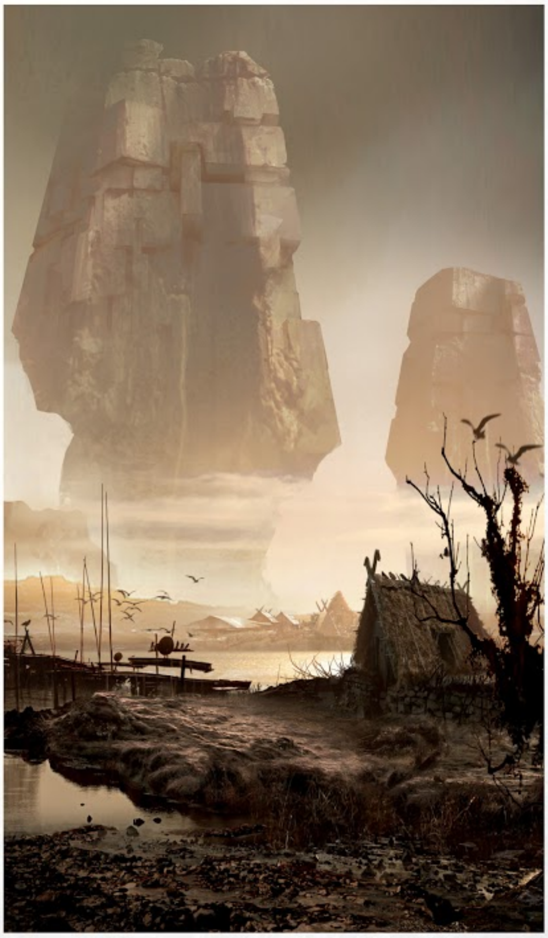


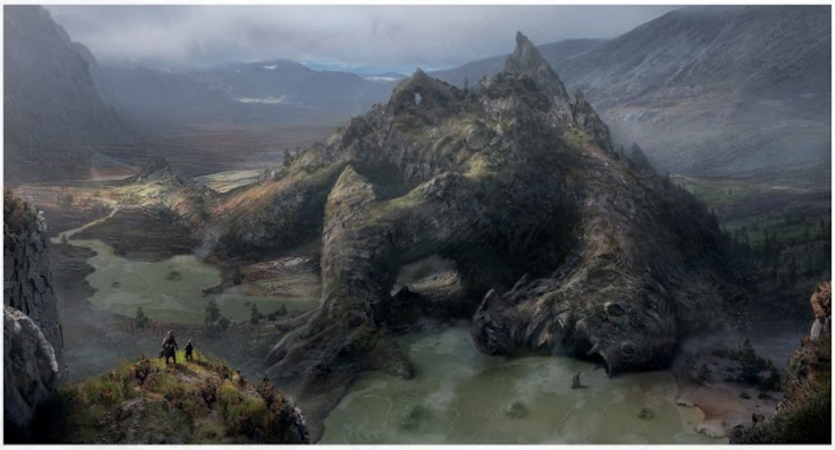


Ruins of Midgard. Artists: Jung Ho Park (top, bottom); Cliff Childs (middle)



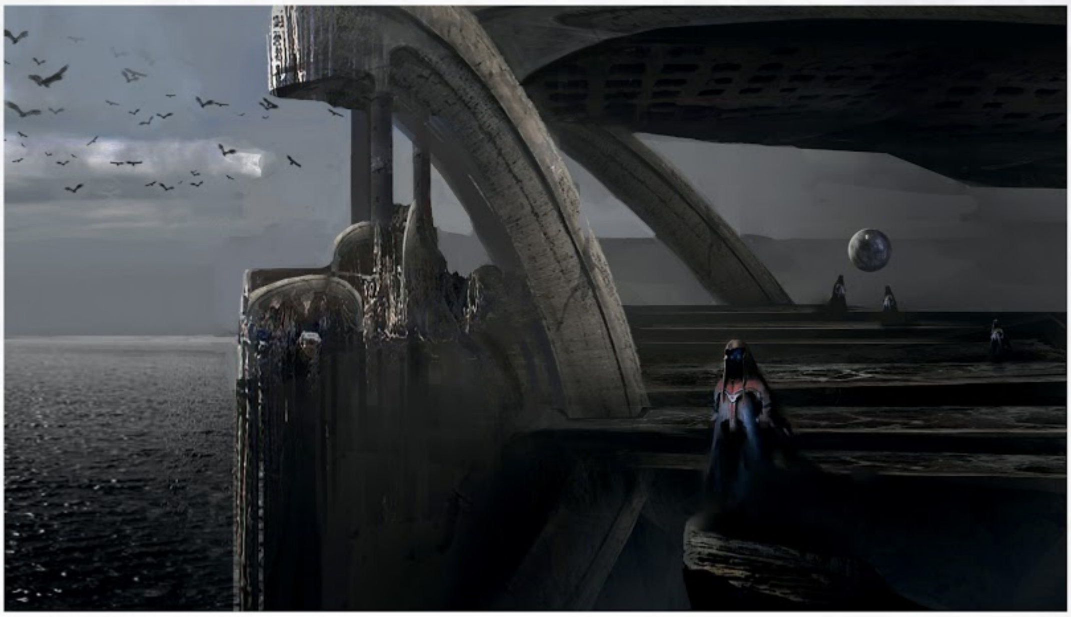


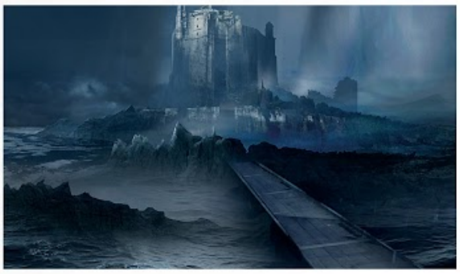


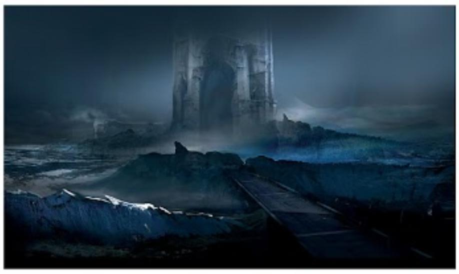


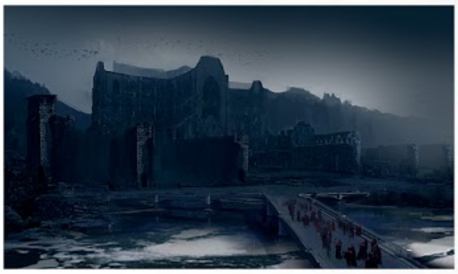
Artists: MOOD (bottom left); Cliff Childs

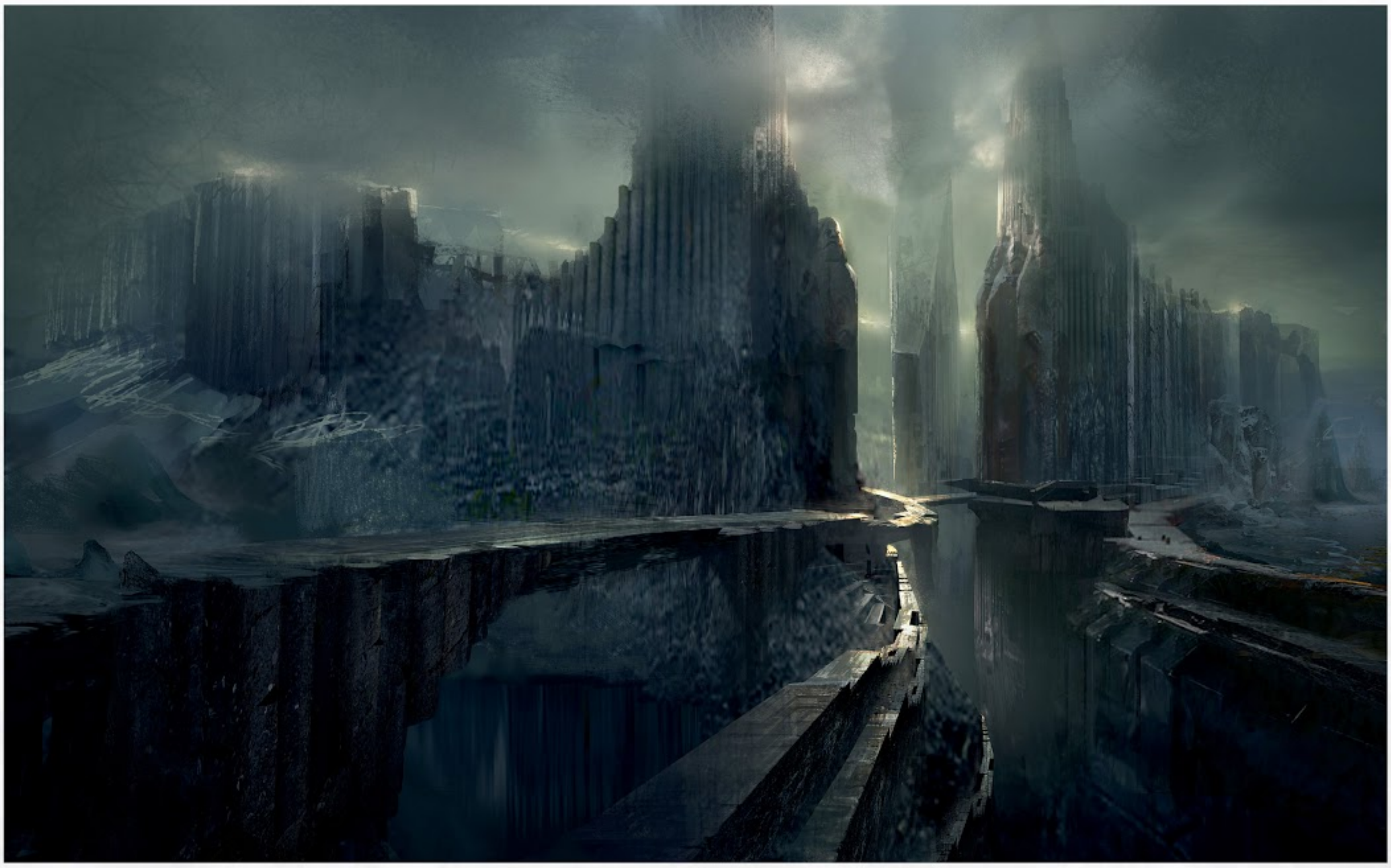
Helheim represented an interesting architectural mystery for the team to crack. Creative director Cory Barlog was adamant about it feeling "colder than cold"; as such, the team played quite a bit with mist and wind, trying to bring a somber feeling to a place where all prior travelers had met inglorious deaths. Here, we can see explorations of the Bridge of the Damned, surveyed by Modgud as they filed in.



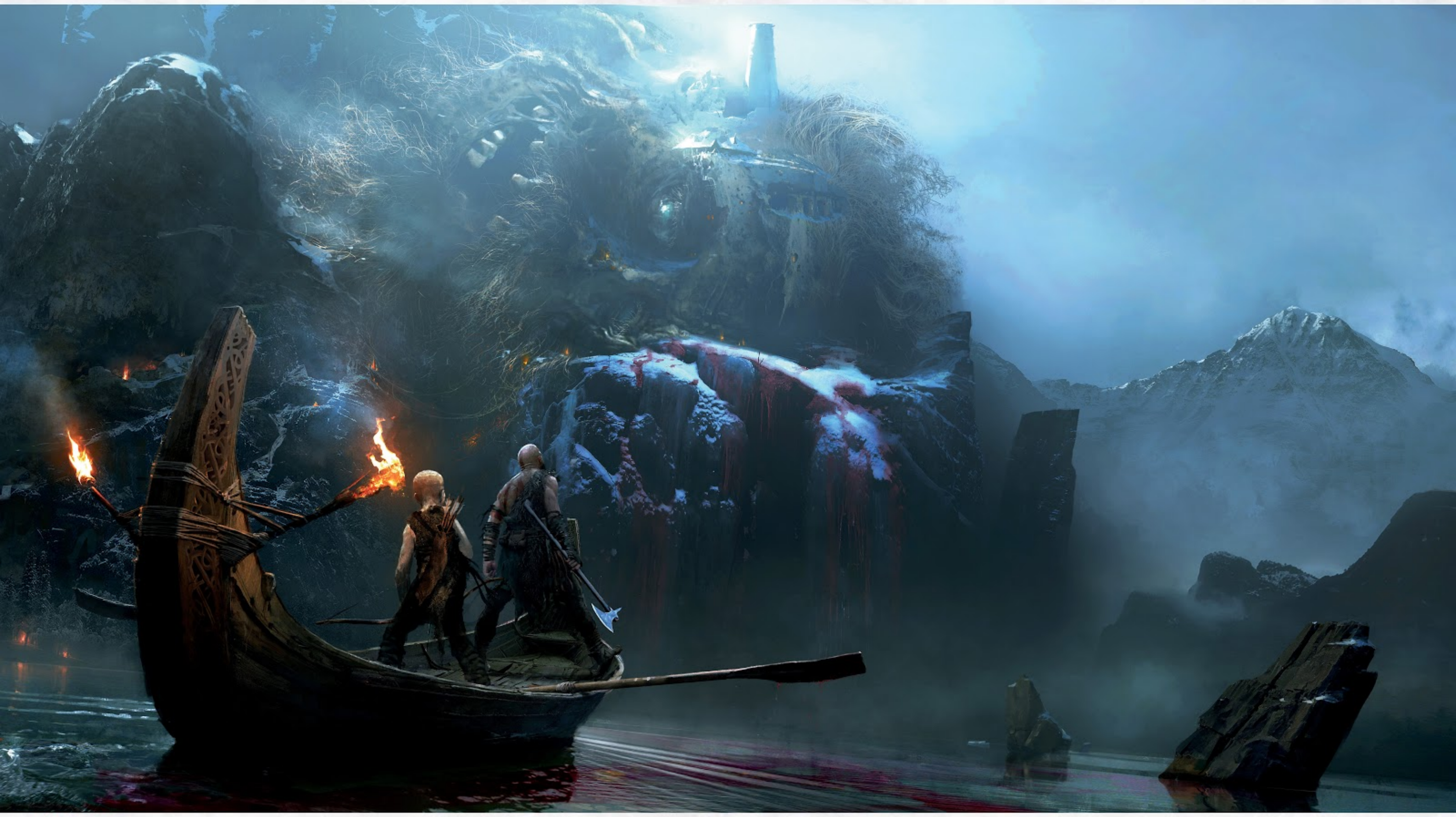






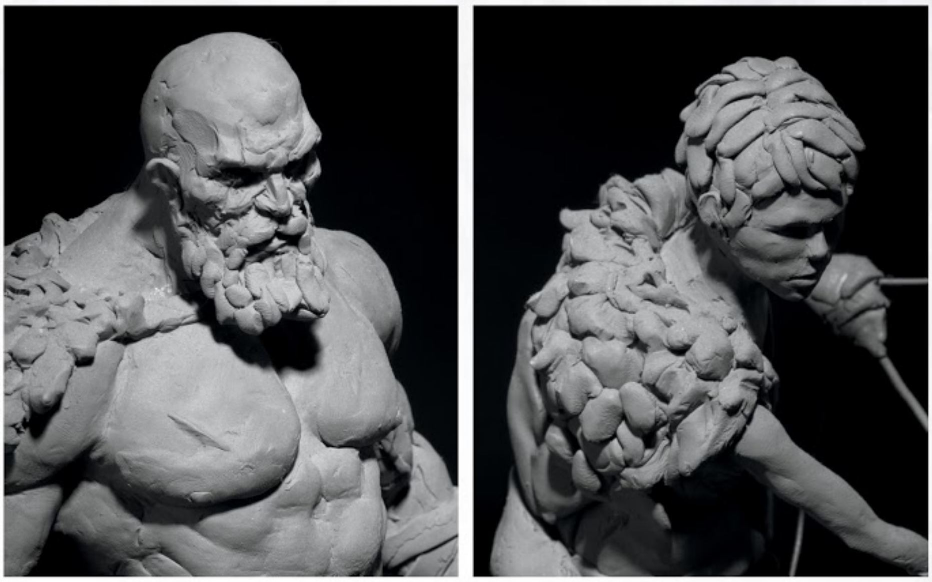


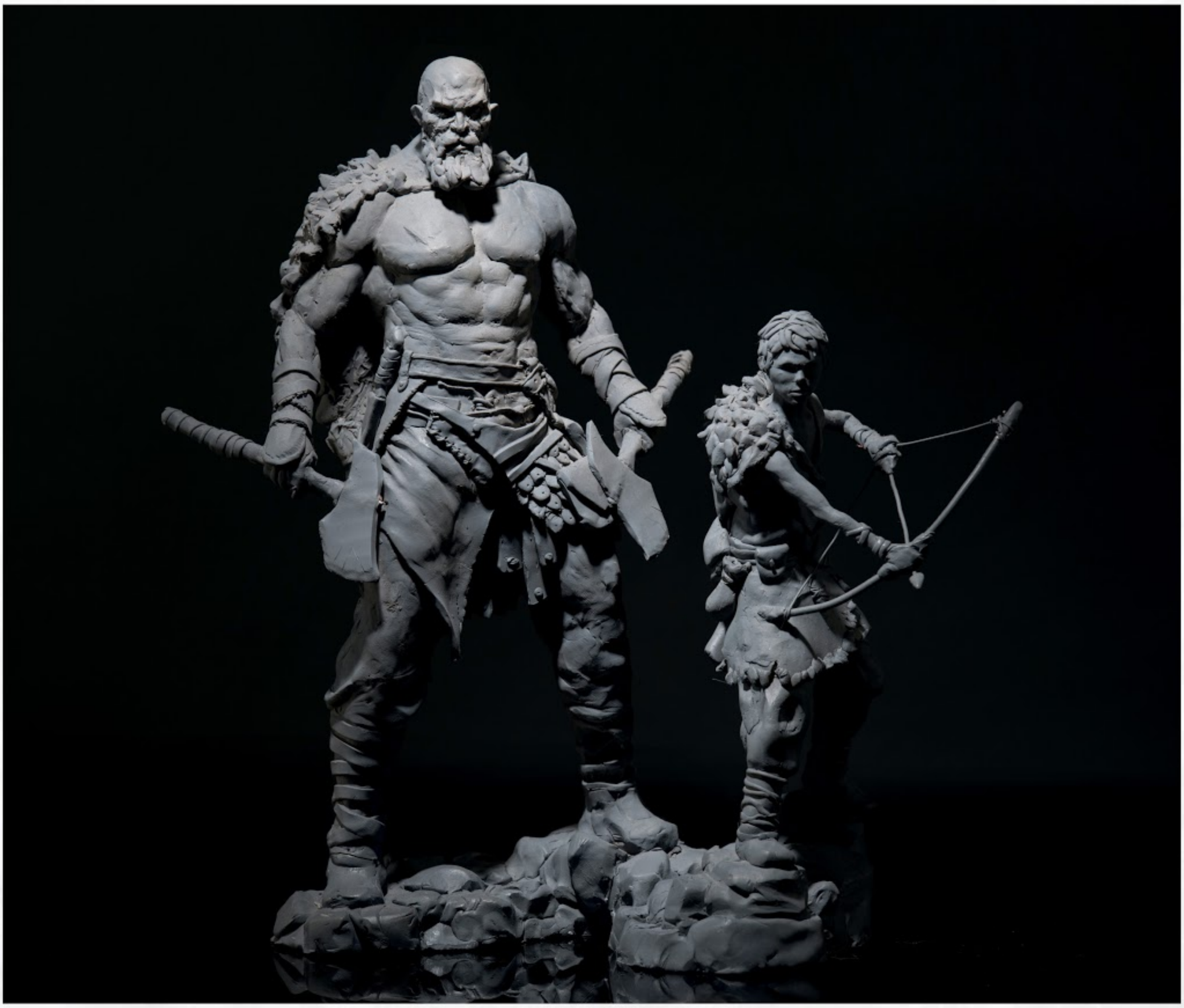
Marching into Helheim. Artists: Cliff Childs (bottom, opposite); Jung Ho Park



City of the Stone Mason. Artist: José Cabrera

While a majority of work created these days is primarily done digitally, it is not the only avenue artists have to explore character designs. Here are a couple of maquette created by Rafael Grassetti for Kratos and Atreus early on in the project. Being able to see a character firsthand in a physical form not only creates an excitement for the team, but also helps anyone not on the art team understand how a design is intended to be fully resolved. "There is a unique connection people get from actually being able to touch and hold a character maquette in their hands," said lead character artist Rafael Grassetti. "Even if the design details are still being worked out, people are able to get a full sense of the character."





Hand-sculpted Kratos and Atreus maquettes. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (sculptor), James Rulison (photographer)

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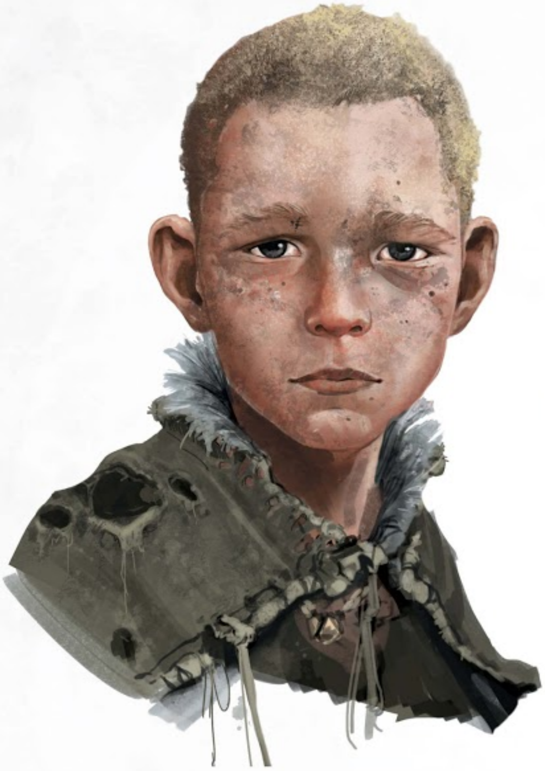
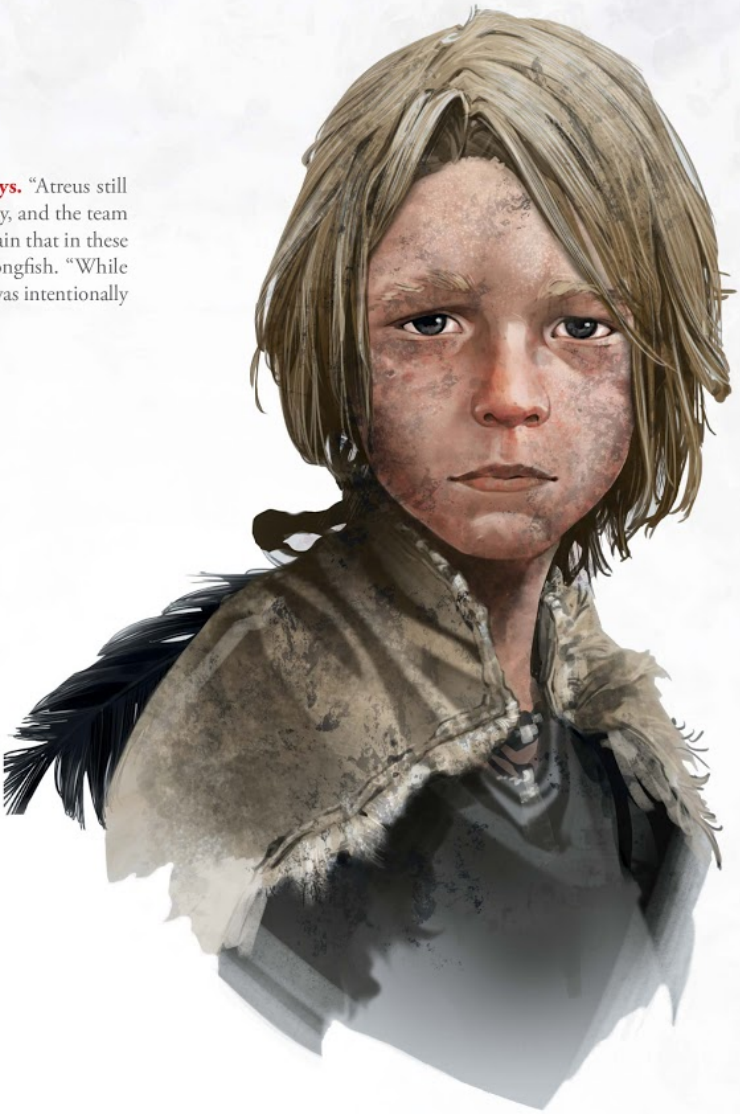
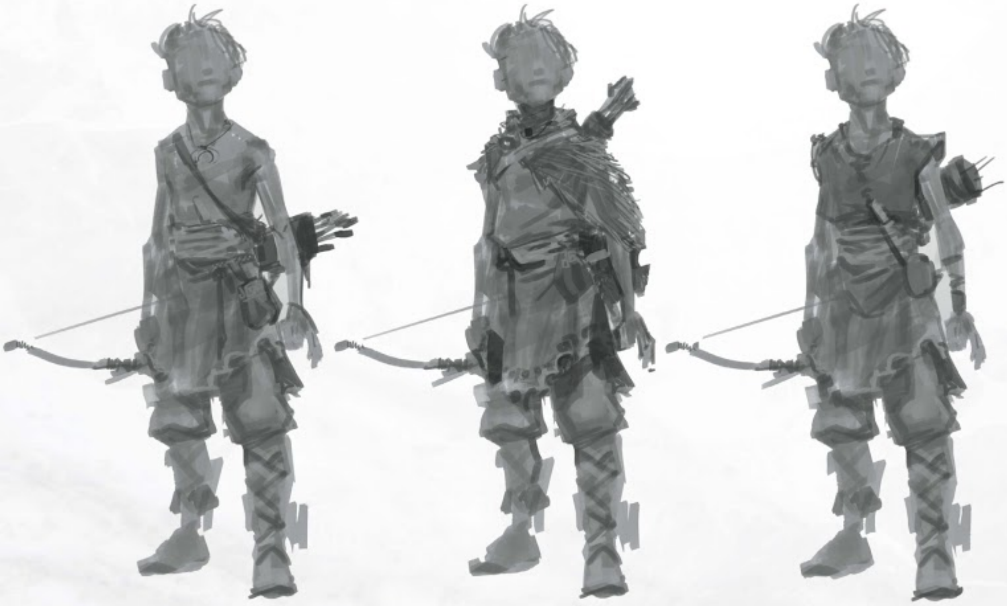
While Atreus is Kratos' son, he's unlike his father in some ways. "Atreus still has an innocent and wondrous view of the world and its mythology, and the team wanted to preserve that feeling throughout his design. I tried to retain that in these early concepts exploring Atreus," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish. "While some may have expected Kratos' son to be muscular and strong, he was intentionally designed to feel more modest."

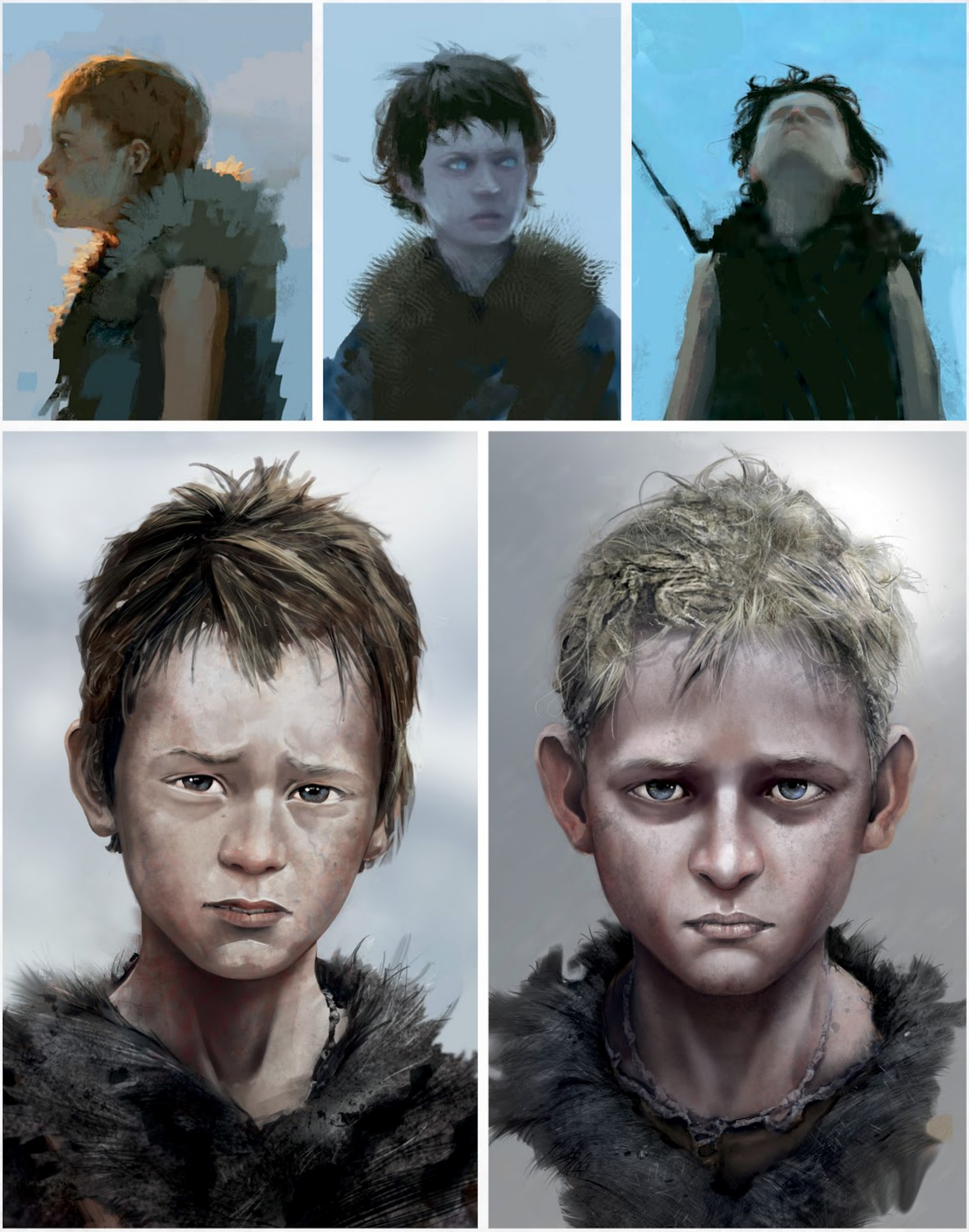






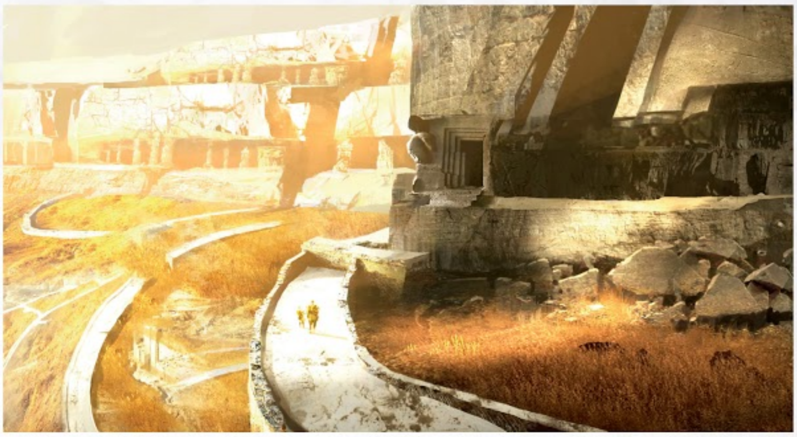
"Cory's strongest point, and the one thing that ties everything together, is that once you understand wonderment—and you understand how that ties in with everything else—it becomes the backbone of everything," said Luke Berliner. "That wonderment from the kid's perspective is the biggest differentiator from this game and the rest of the *God of War* franchise."

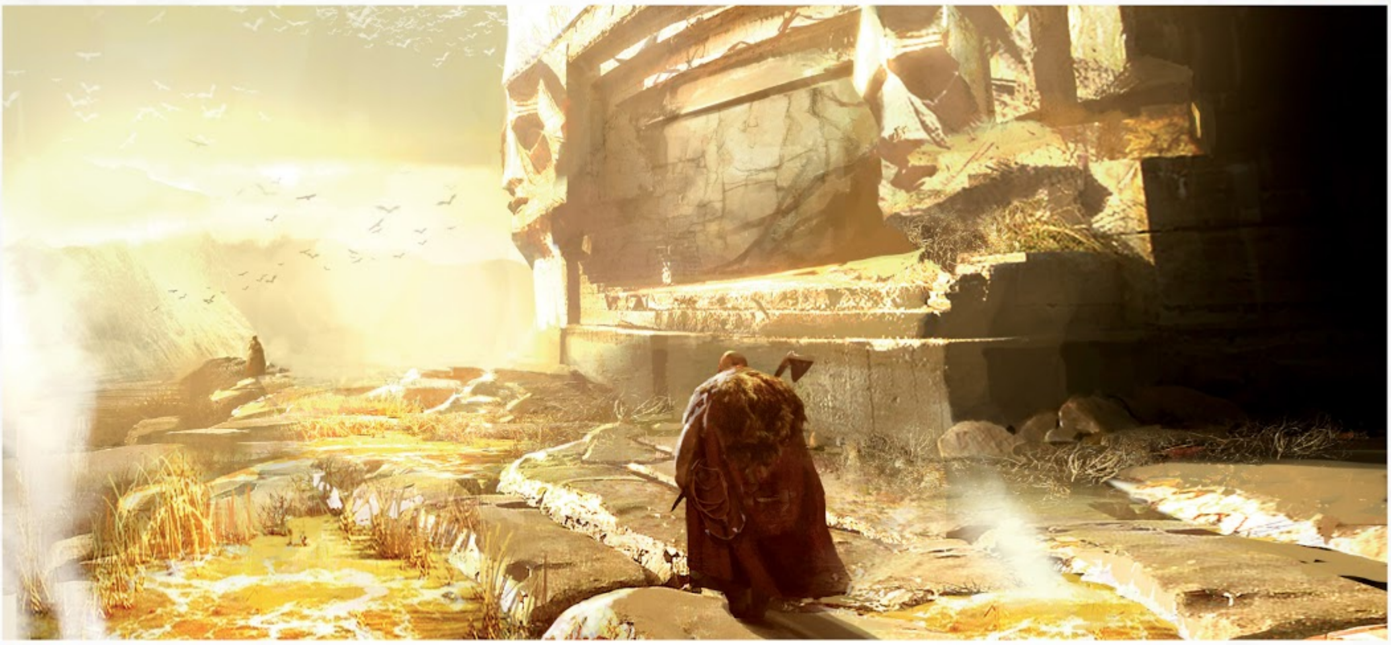
Exploring Atreus. Artist: Dela Longfish

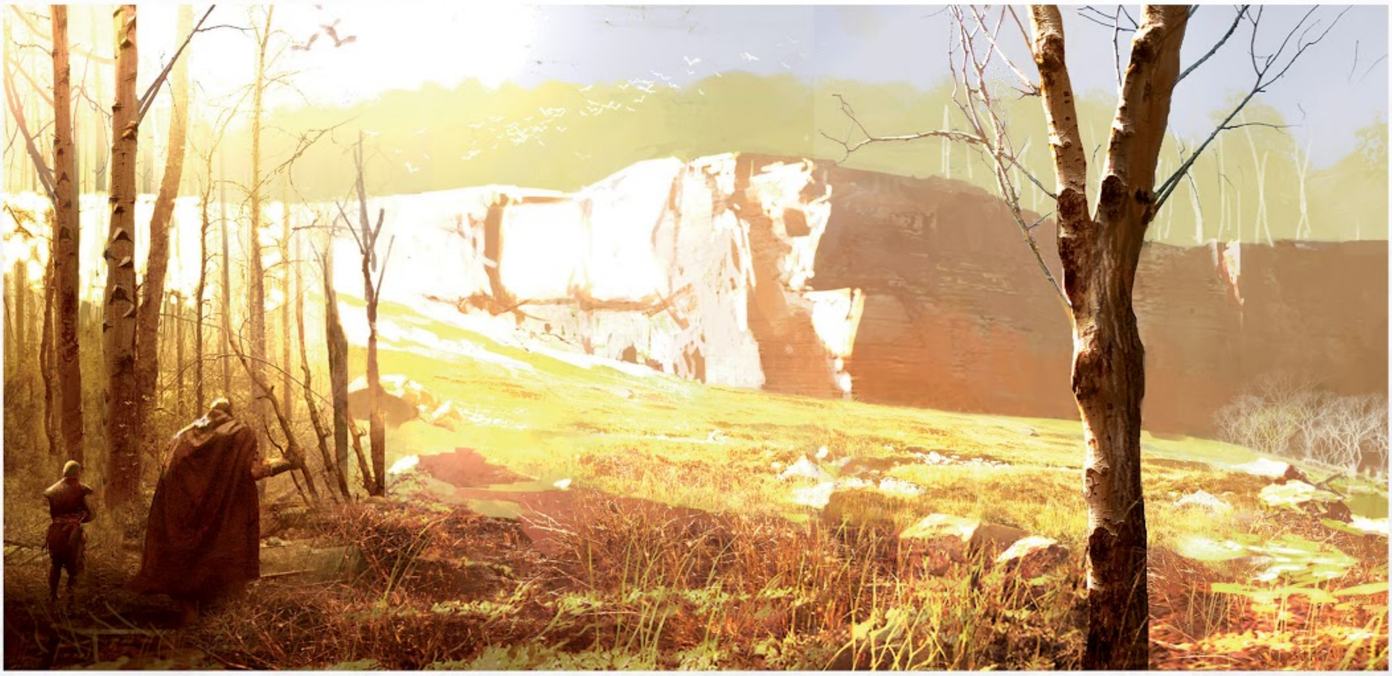


Artists: José Cabrera (top); Dela Longfish (bottom)

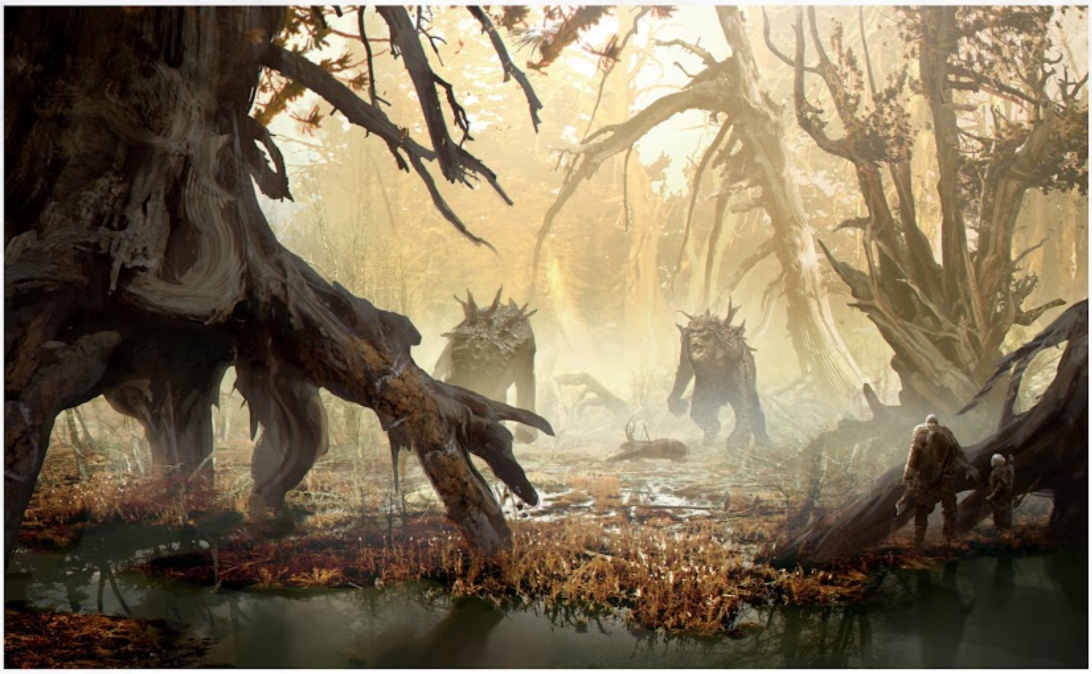
The paradise of Jötunheim was always intended to be the end goal of the game. The team thought early on that all the Nomads and Travelers that Kratos meets on his journey would be searching for a way to access it themselves too. That idea was scrapped, but the notion remained that Jötunheim is a land of bounty, with glittering fields as far as the eye can see.



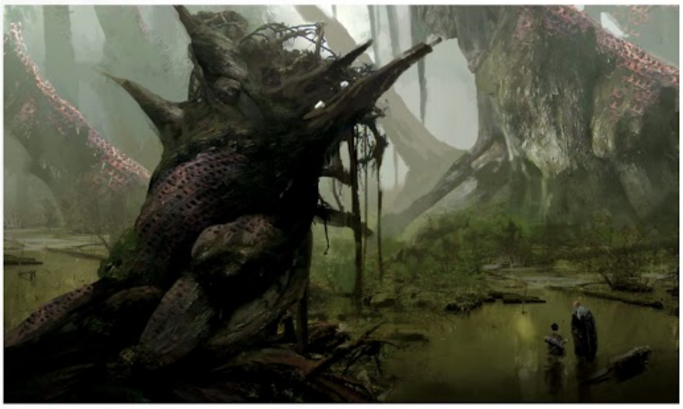


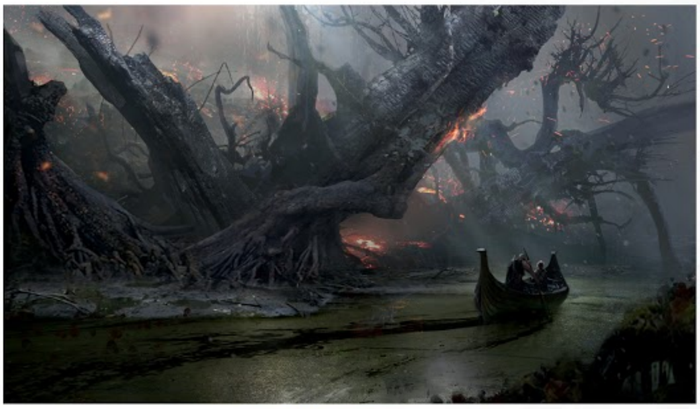


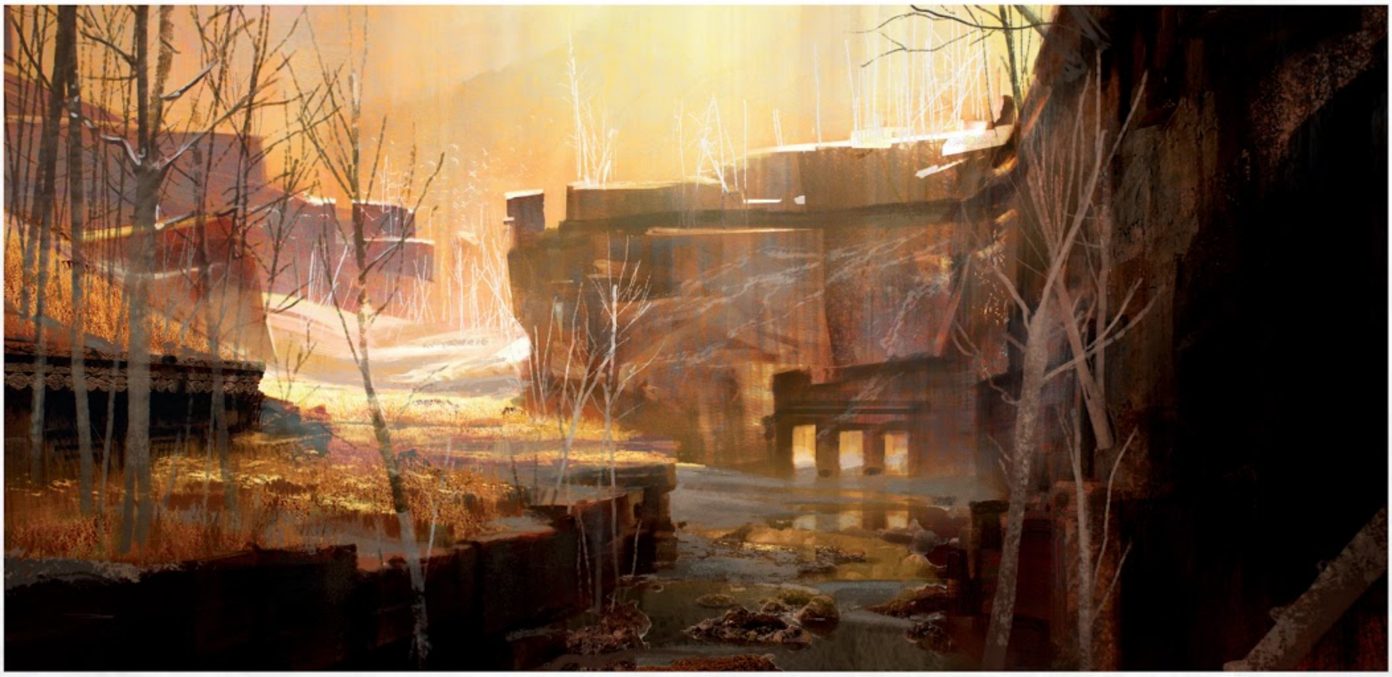
The glittering fields of Jötunheim. Artist: Jung Ho Park



Here are early concepts for the Jötunheim levels. Looking for something with a darker tone, the artists thought it would be interesting to populate the land with misshapen metal trees spouting fire. Jötunheim represents a realm with a dry desert feel, and the final version stayed pretty close to the colors shown in these pieces.



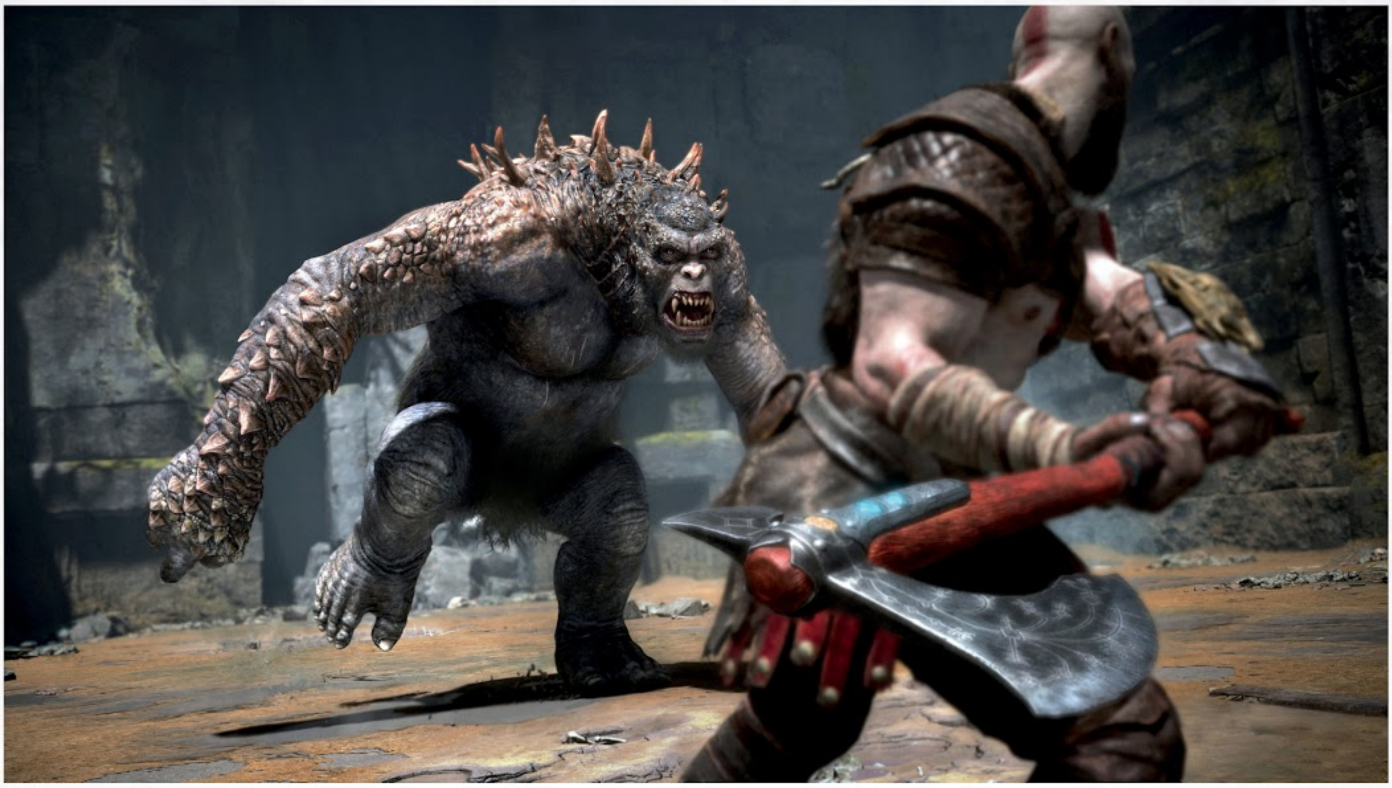


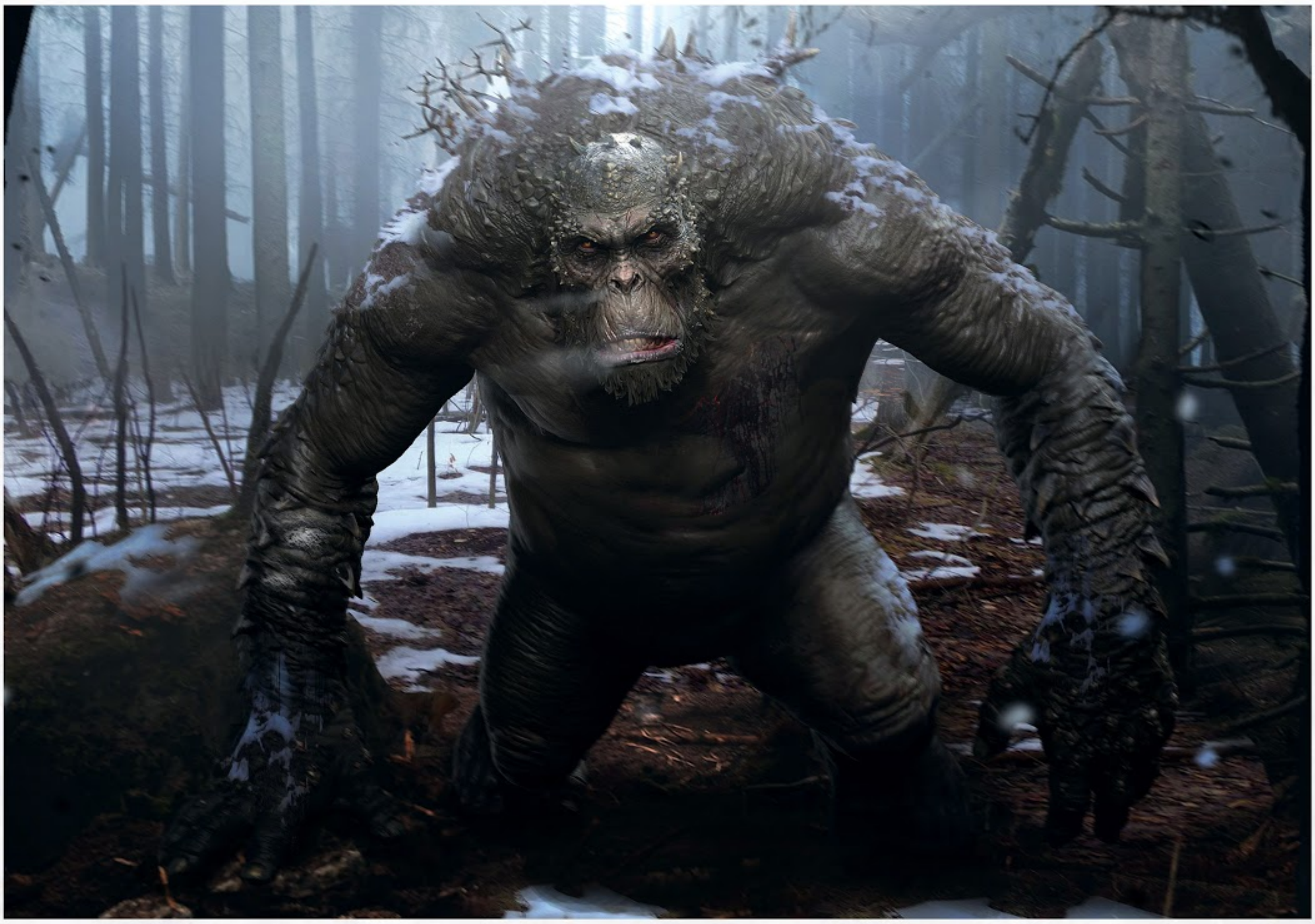


Artists: Cliff Childs (top, middle right); Jung Ho Park (middle left); Luke Berliner (bottom)

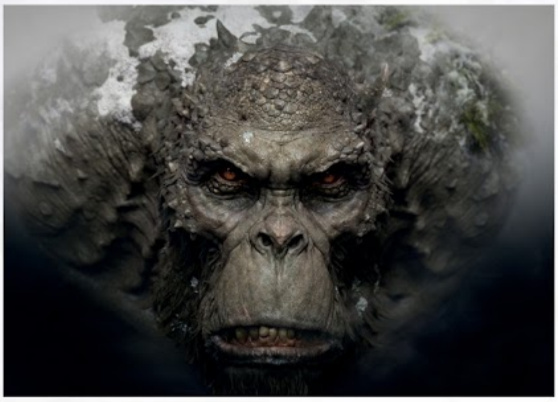
Midgard 3-D look development. Artists: Dan McKim, Kevin Quinn, Erik Jakobsen (top); Aaron Contreras, Stéphane Gaudette, Isabelle Lemay (bottom)

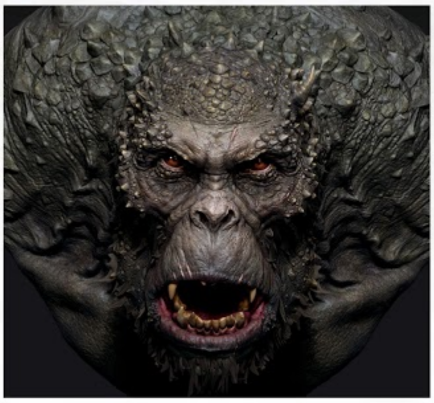
Artists: Nate Stephens, John Palamarchuk, Sukru Gilman, Paul Coda



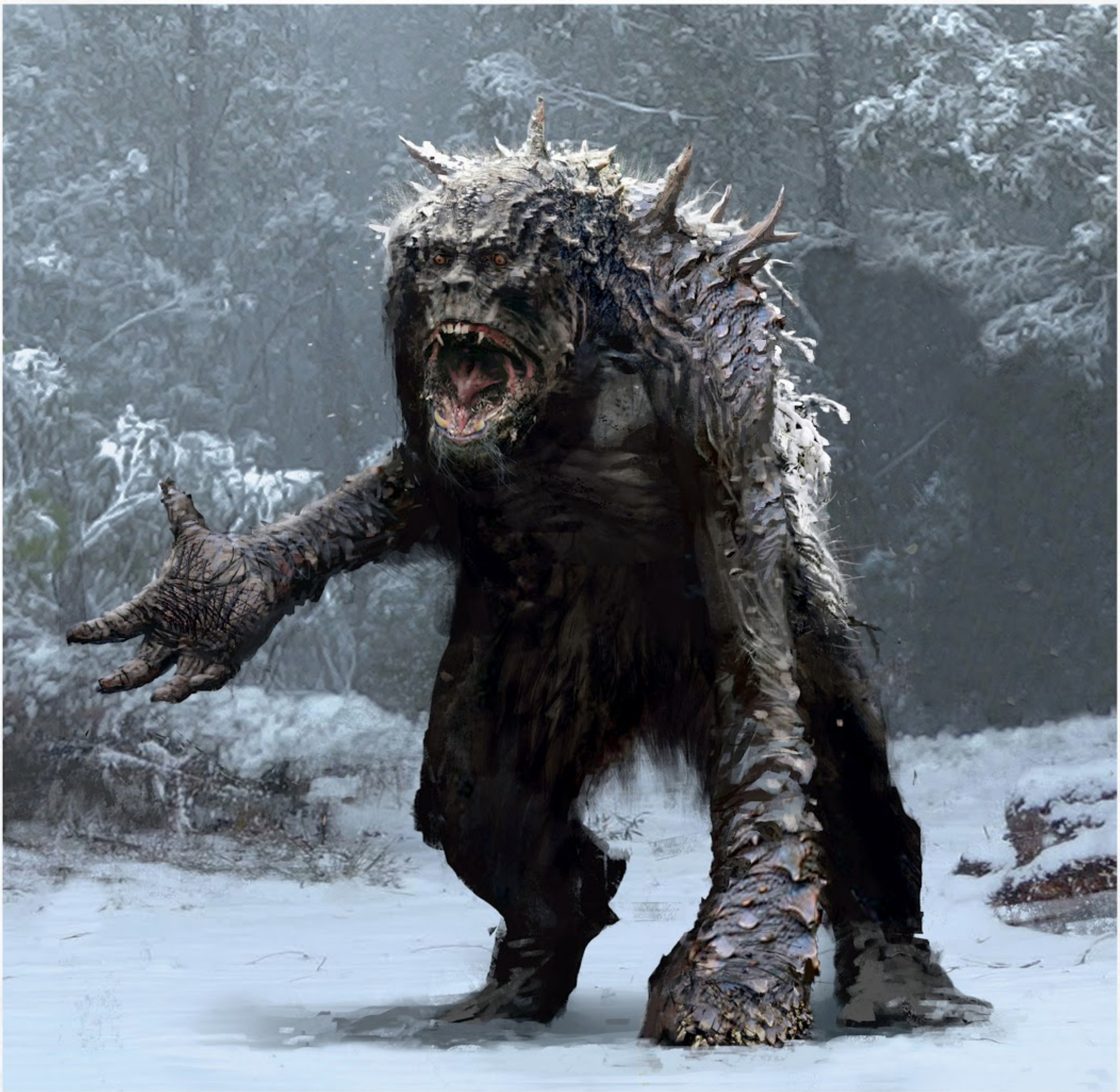


Ogre exploration. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top, bottom); Axel Grossman (top); Jung Ho Park (bottom)



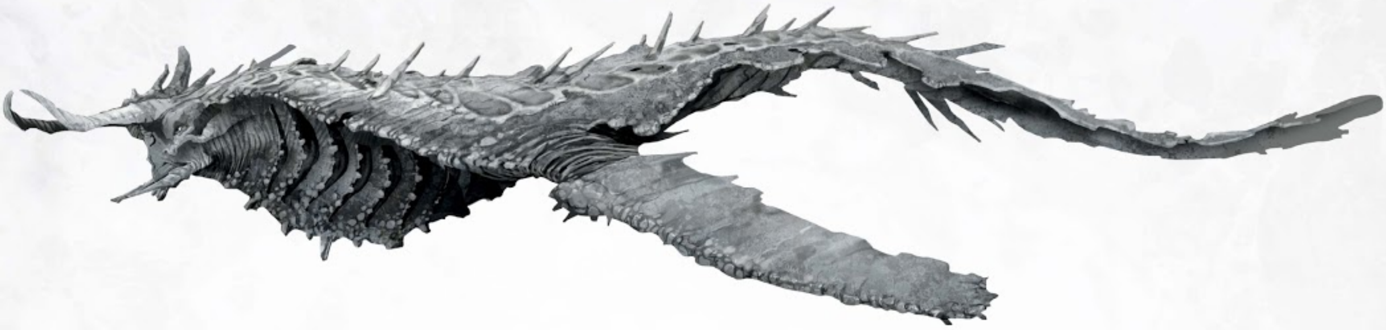


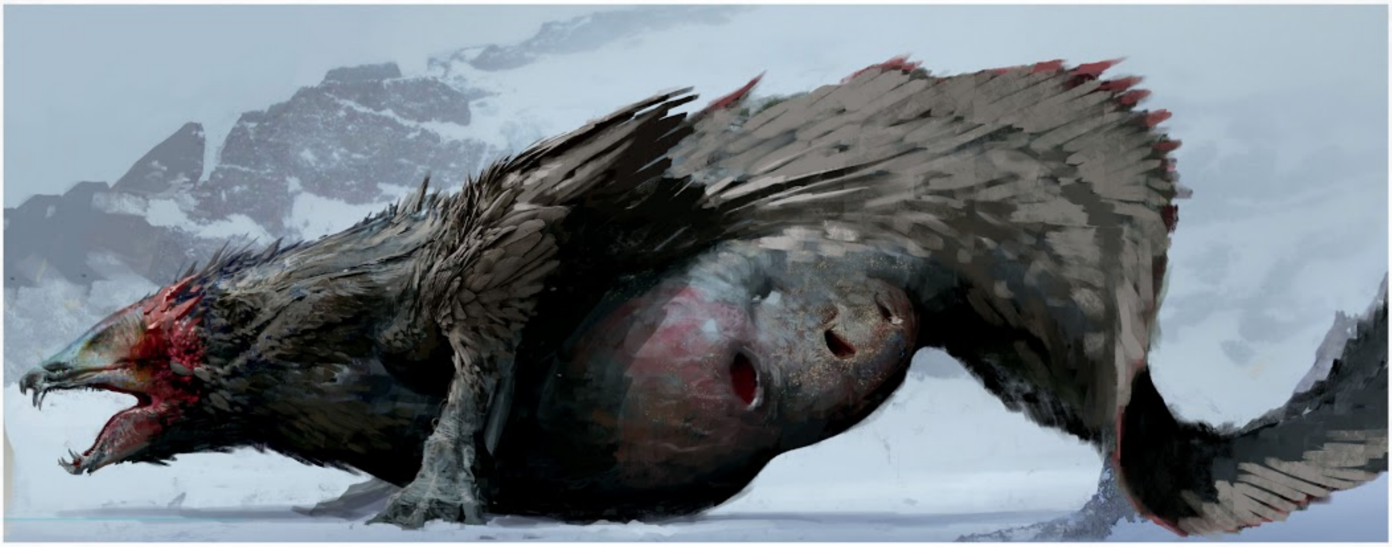
The Ogre was an early design created by José Cabrera, exploring a creature that's unique to Norse mythology. "Like many of the creatures in our game, we wanted to push the fantastic, while at the same time achieving believability with their designs," says lead concept artist Dela Longfish.

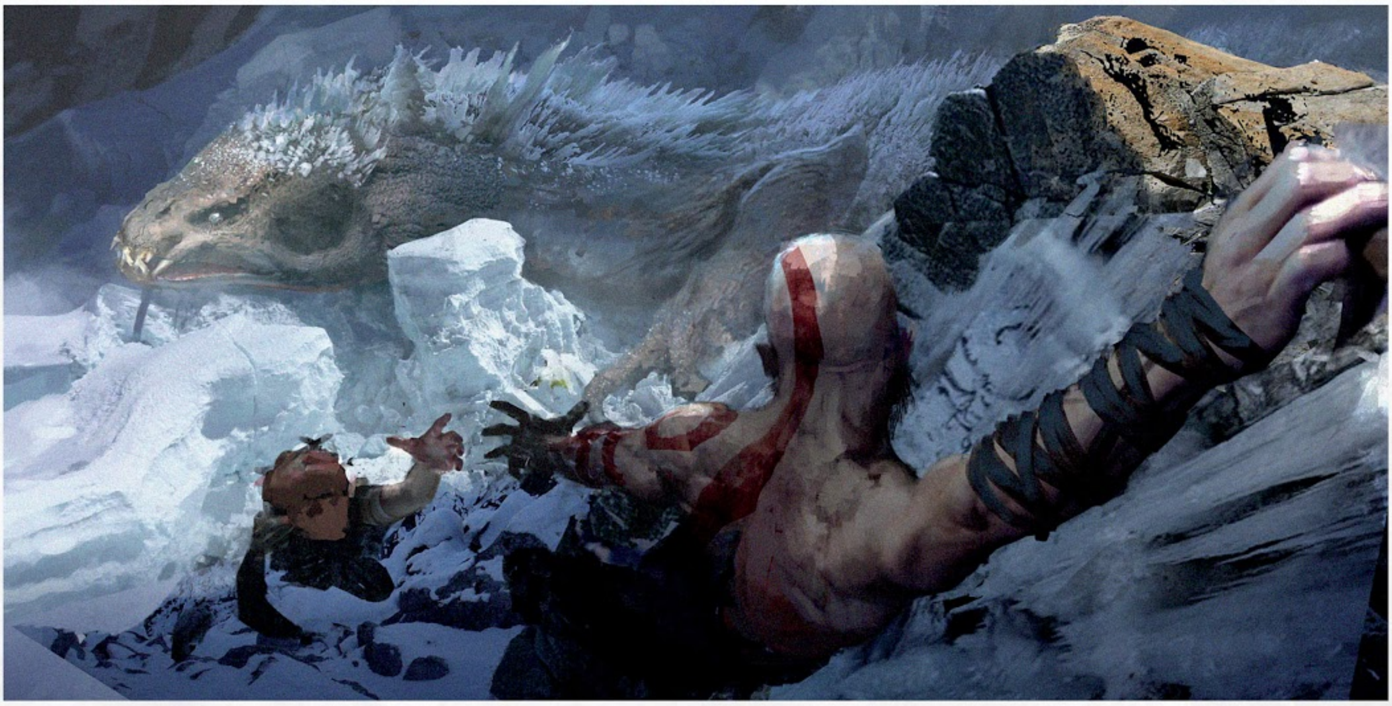


Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top); José Cabrera (bottom)

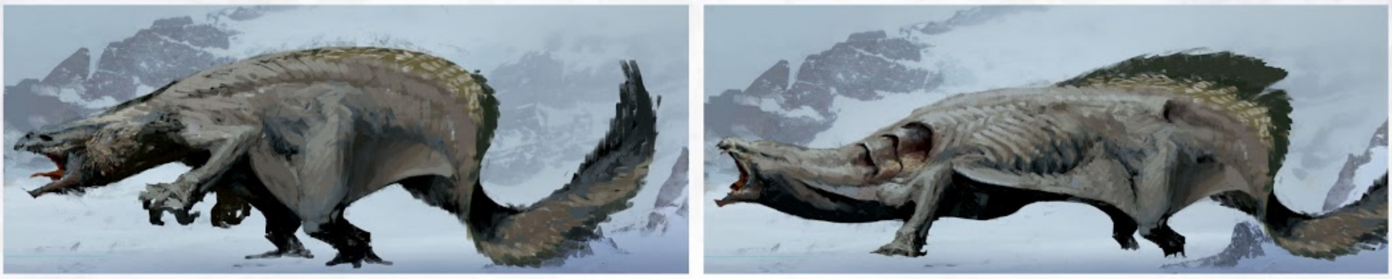
With dragons being such a well-known part of Norse mythology, these were among some of the earliest creatures the team explored. Getting a feeling for their scale and how their environment might influence them was essential, along with their unique methods of flight.

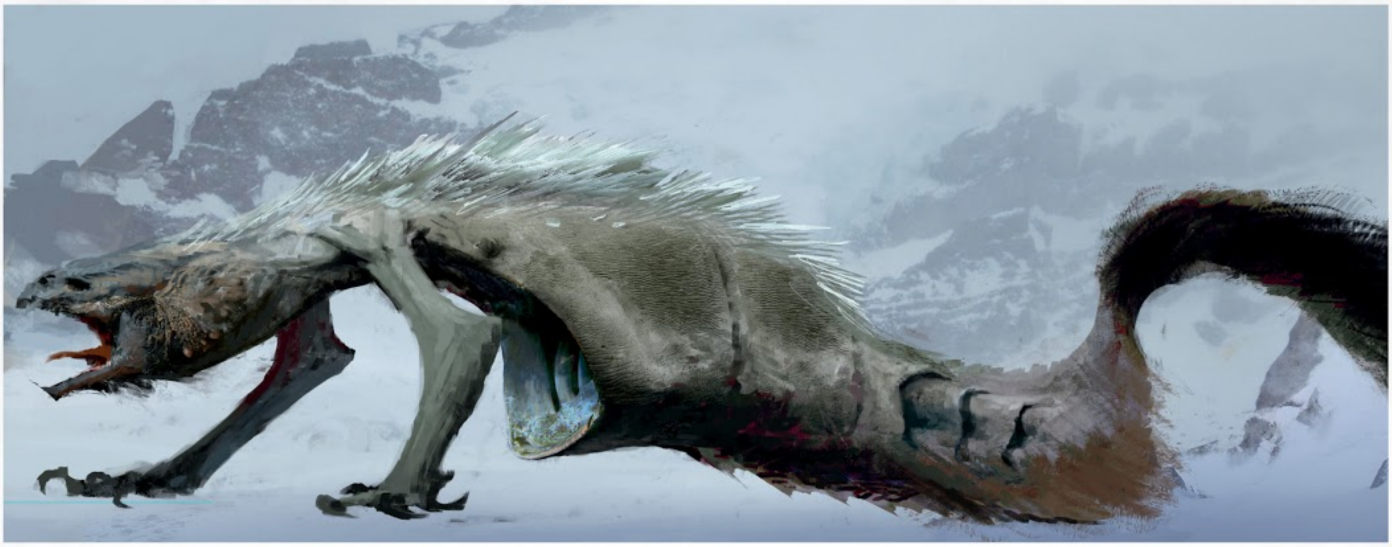


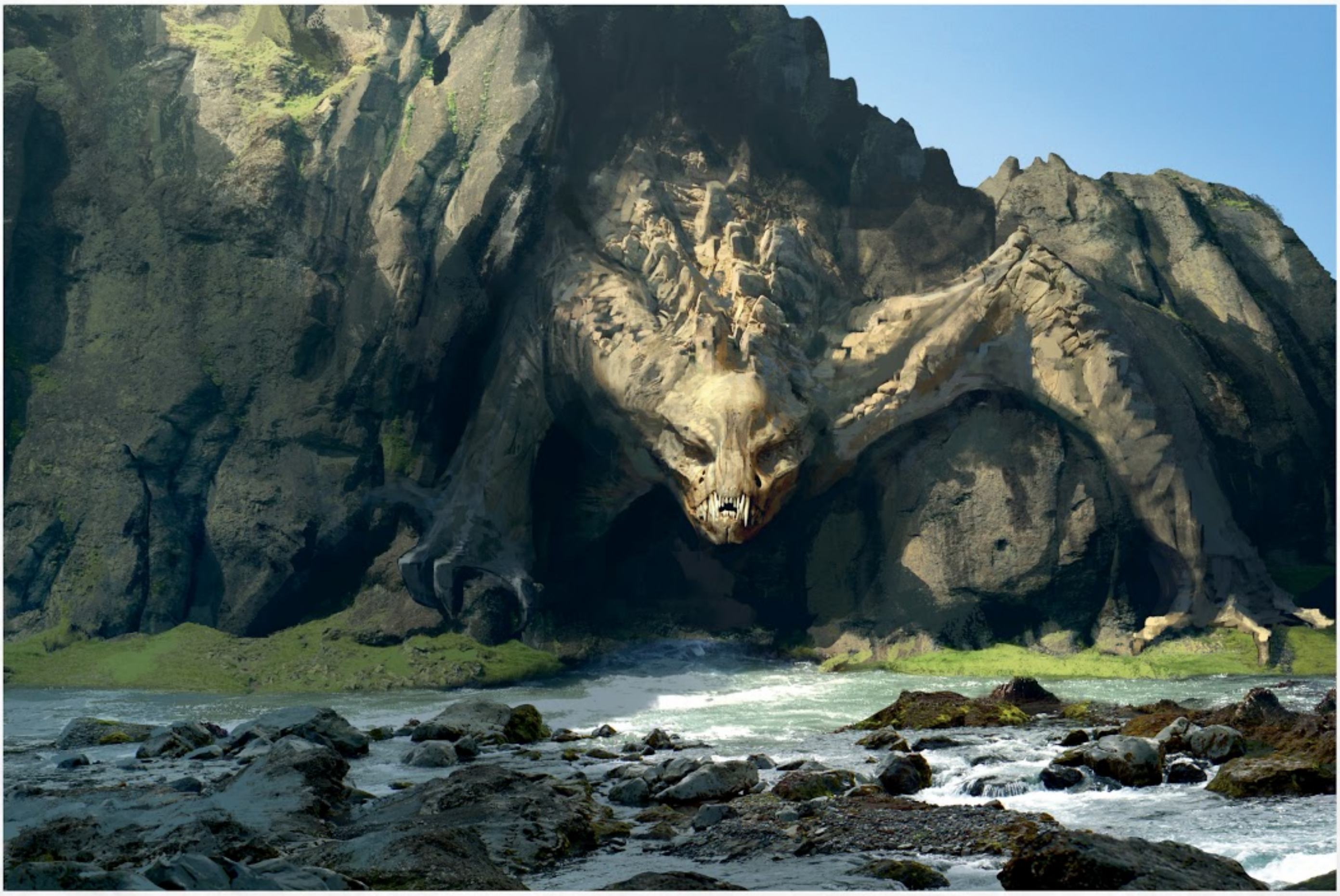




Exploring a new look for dragons. Artists: Dela Longfish (top); José Cabrera





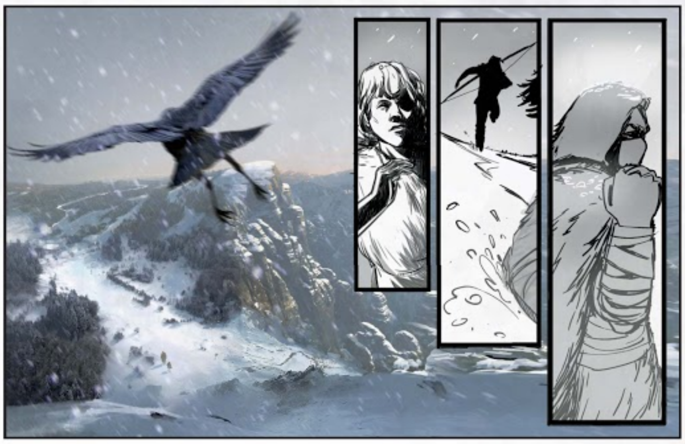


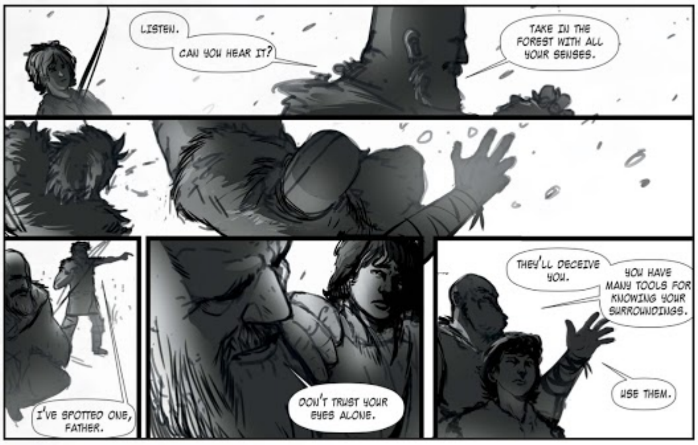
Artists: José Cabrera (this page); Mark Castanon (bottom)

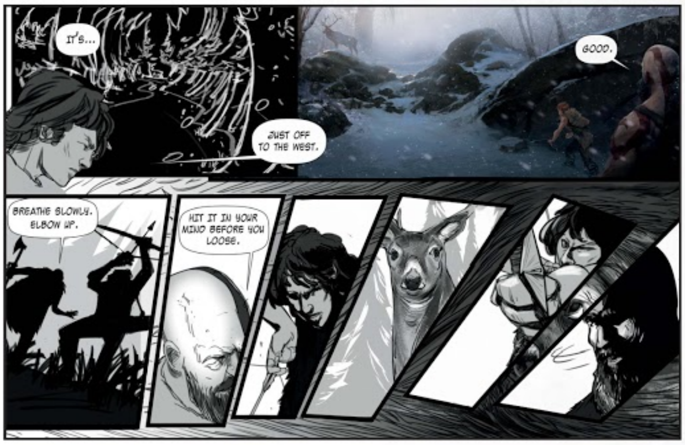
One day during development, every team member arrived at work to find a book on each of their desks. The team had worked very hard to give everyone a guide for how to start thinking about the project—to illustrate what was important to them, what the mood of the game was meant to be, and how they wanted it to play. This "creative bible" had the net result of aligning everyone on the team, and they spent the day reading it and talking about what each would need to do to support it.

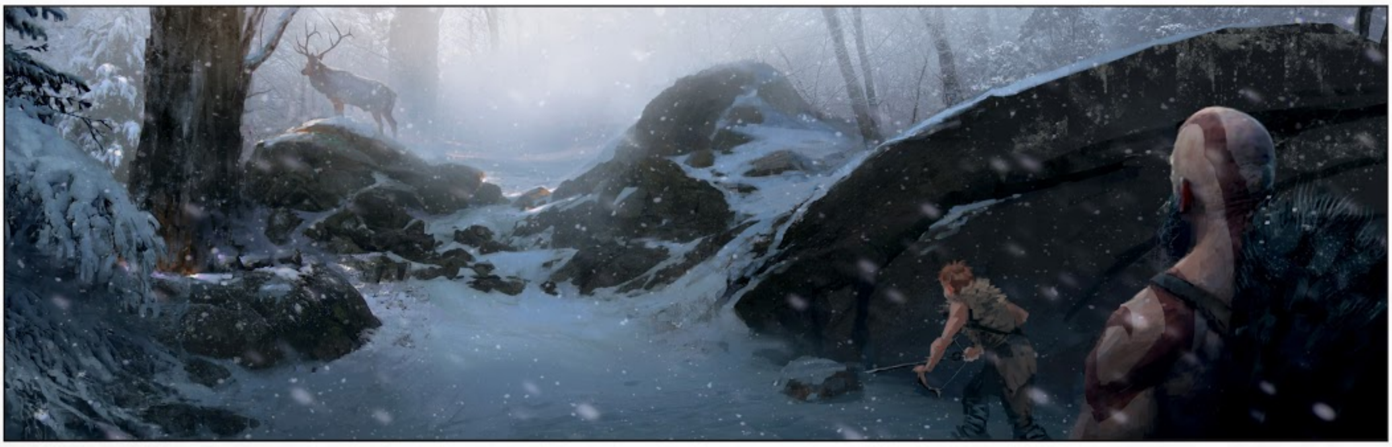
In the back of that book was a comic created by Joe Kennedy, which was perhaps the new *God of War*'s most representative piece at the time. Indeed, the role of Kratos' son in the game was one of the biggest unknowns for the team, and these strips definitely helped sell it. Some of the other paintings from that book are sprinkled throughout this chapter as well.

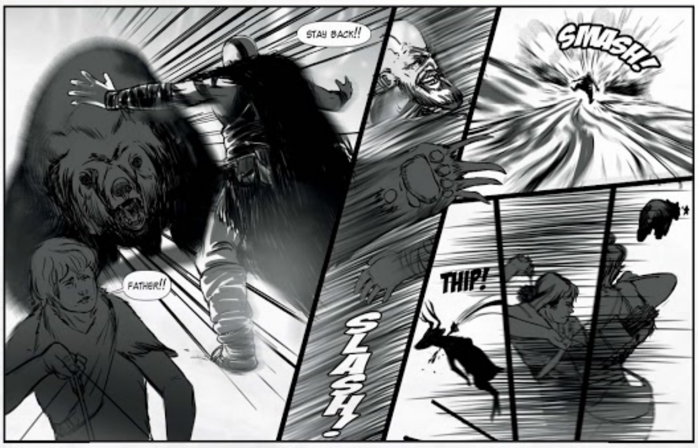
Artists: José Cabrera, Joe Kennedy

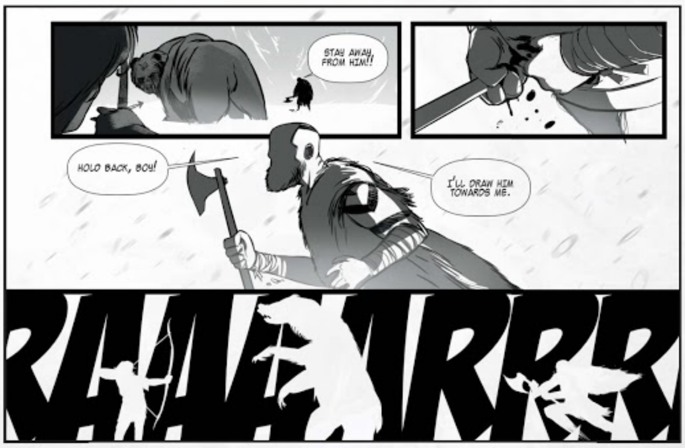


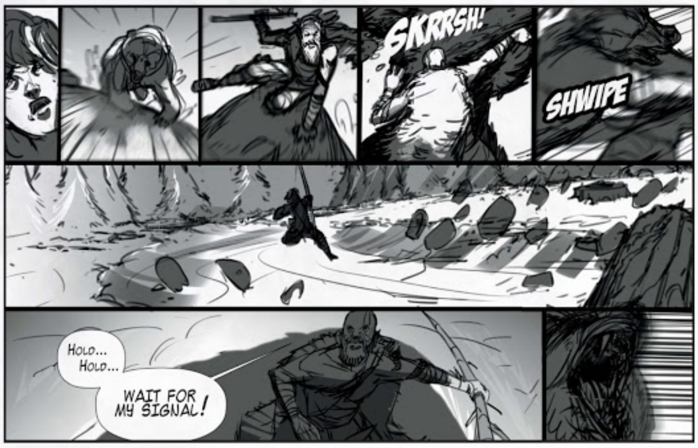

LISTEN.
CAN YOU HEAR IT?
TAKE IN THE FOREST WITH ALL YOUR SENSES.
I'VE SPOTTED ONE, FATHER.
DON'T TRUST YOUR EYES ALONE.
THEY'LL DECEIVE YOU.
YOU HAVE MANY TOOLS FOR KNOWING YOUR SURROUNDINGS.
USE THEM.

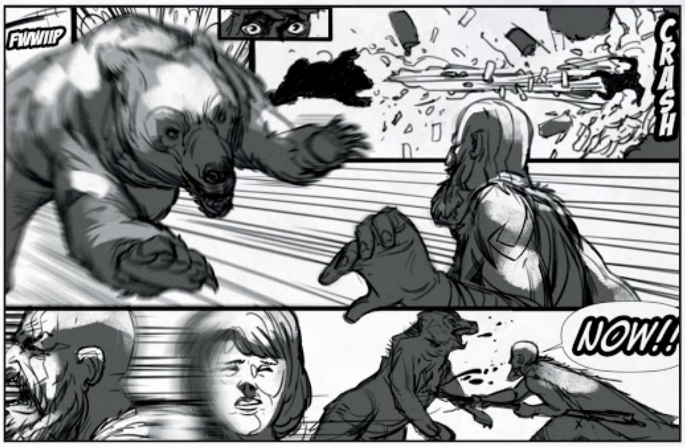

IT'S...
JUST OFF TO THE WEST.
GOOD.
BREATHE SLOWLY. ELBOW UP.
HIT IT IN YOUR MIND BEFORE YOU LOOSE.

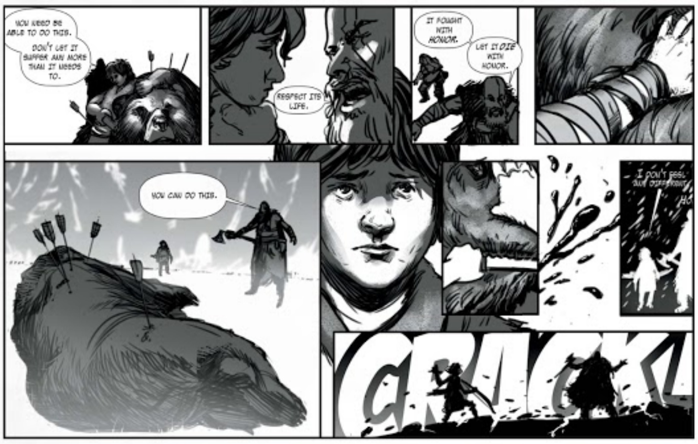


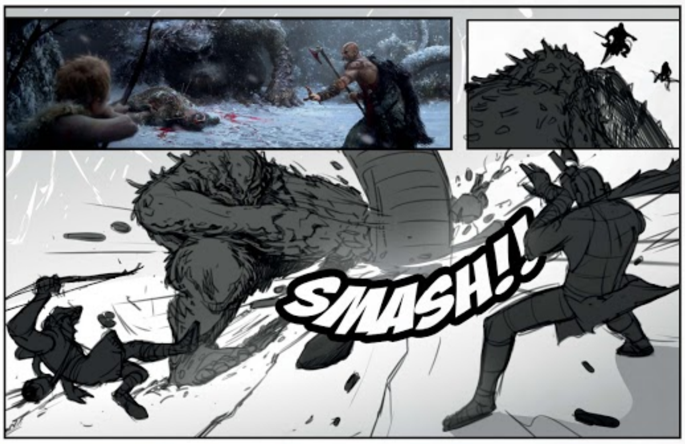

STAY BACK!!
SMASH!
FATHER!!
SLASH!
THIP!

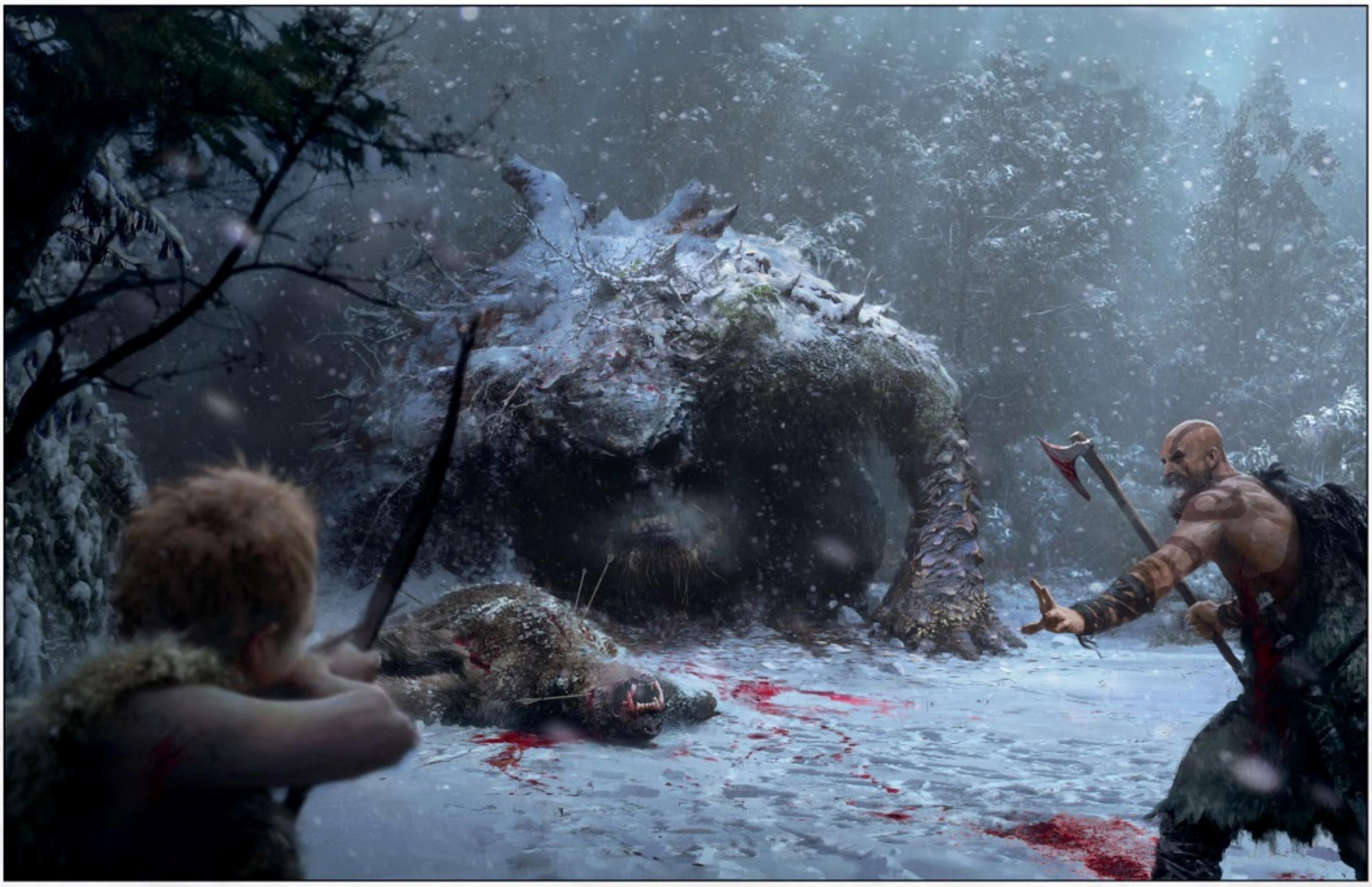

STAY AWAY FROM HIM!!
HOLD BACK, BOY!
I'LL DRAW HIM TOWARDS ME.
RAAAARRR

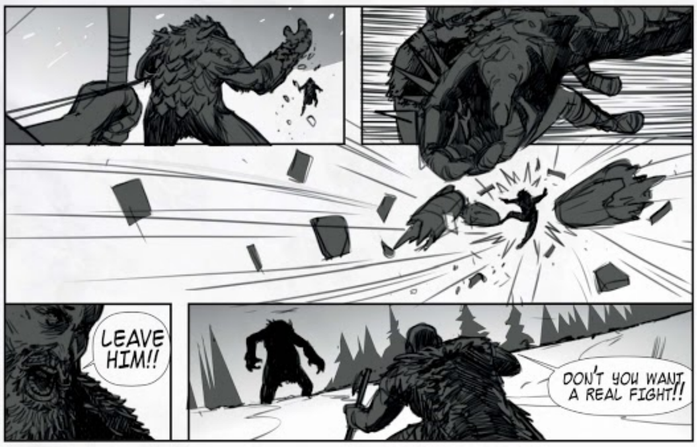

SKRRSH!
SHWIPE
HOLD...
HOLD...
WAIT FOR MY SIGNAL!

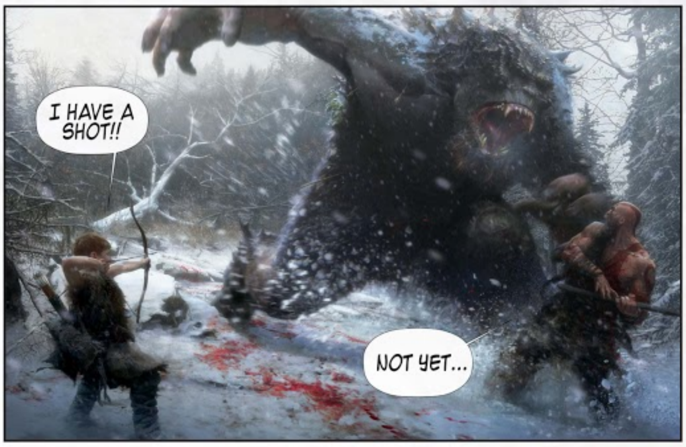

FWWIIP
CRASH
NOW!!

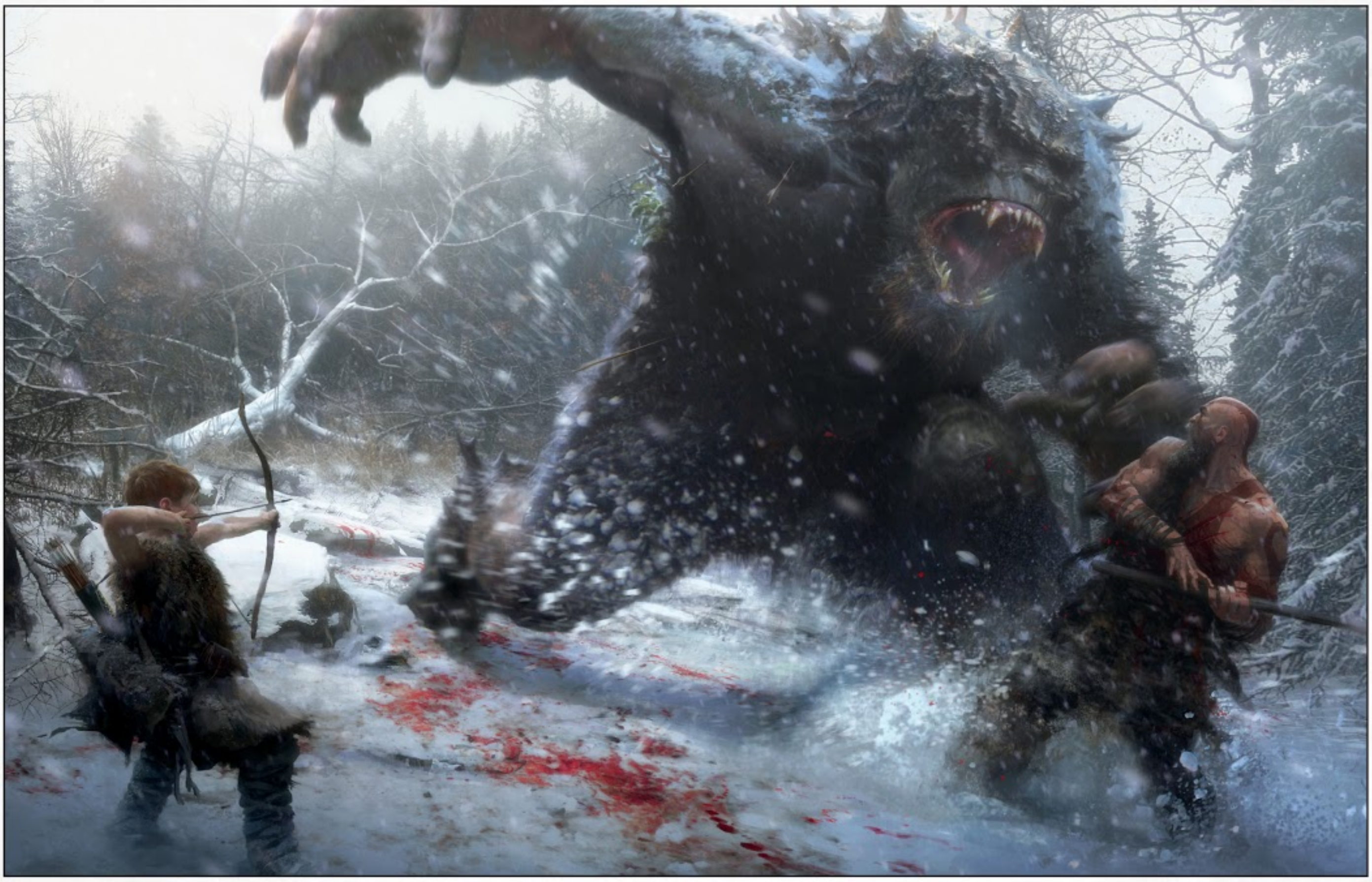

YOU NEED BE ABLE TO DO THIS.
DON'T LET IT SUFFER ANY MORE THAN IT NEEDS TO.
RESPECT ITS LIFE.
IT FOUGHT WITH HONOR.
LET IT DIE WITH HONOR.
YOU CAN DO THIS.
I DON'T FEEL ANY DIFFERENT.
CRACK!

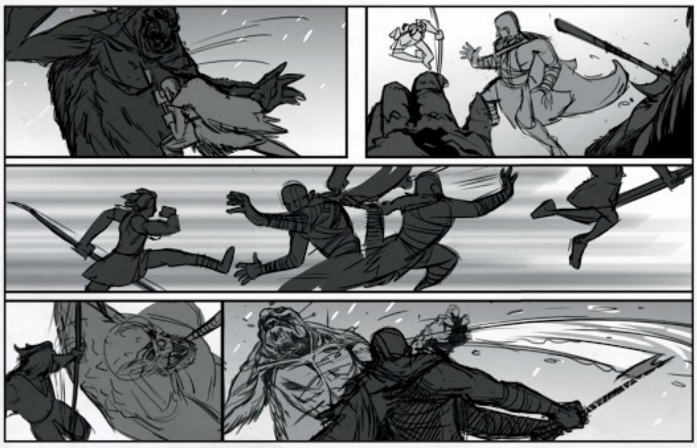

SMASH!!

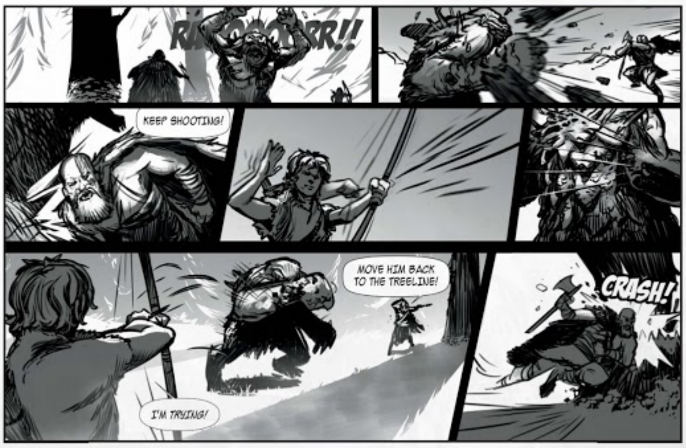


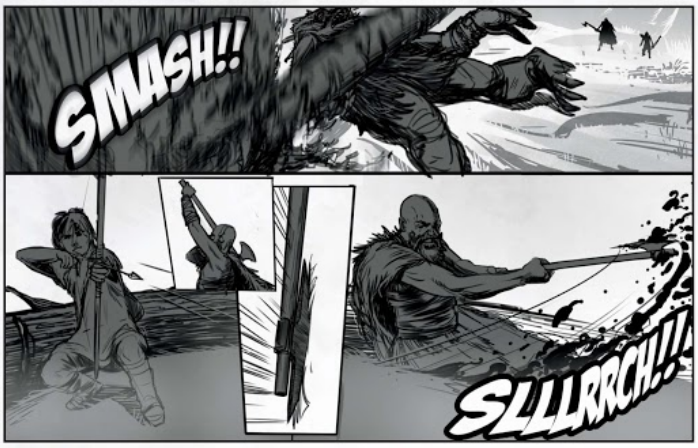

LEAVE HIM!!
DON'T YOU WANT A REAL FIGHT!!

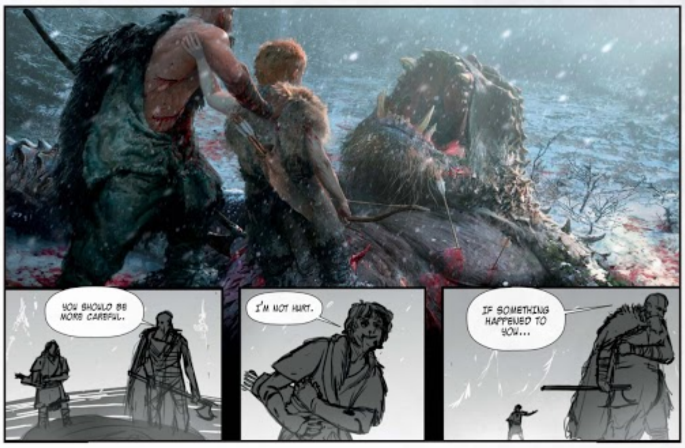

I HAVE A SHOT!!
NOT YET...

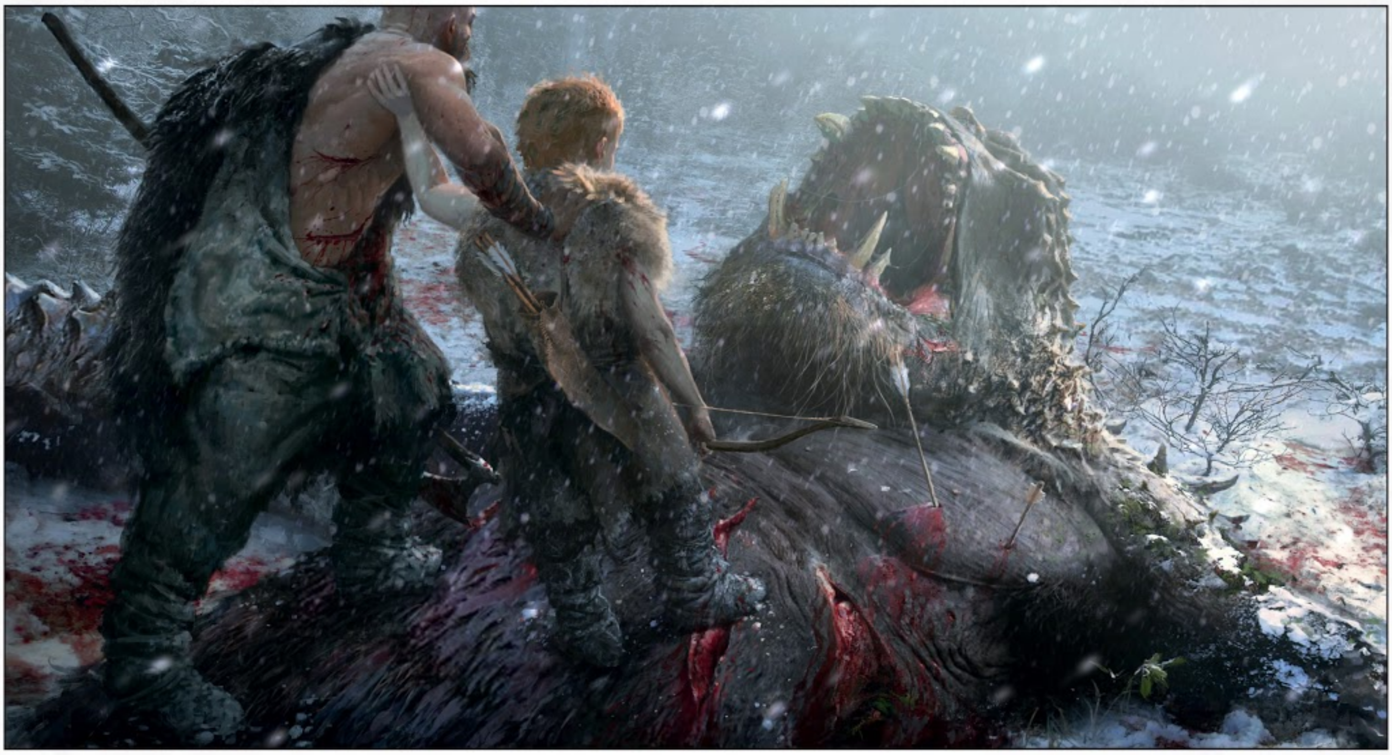


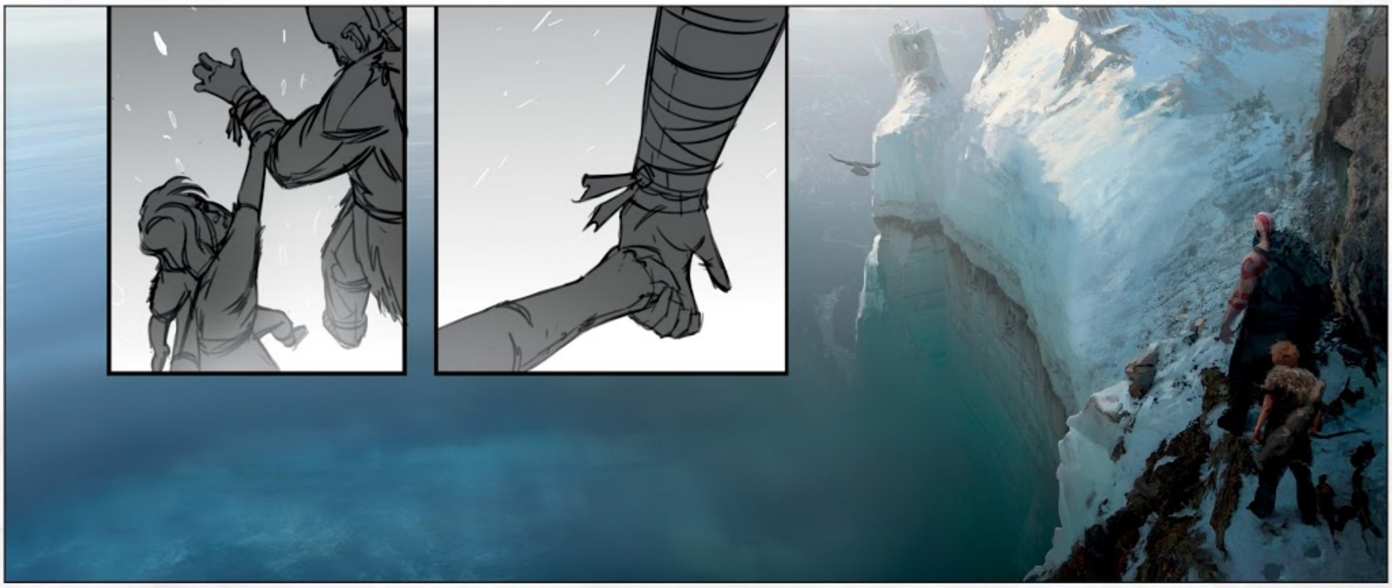



RAOOOORR!!
KEEP SHOOTING!
MOVE HIM BACK TO THE TREELINE!
I'M TRYING!
CRASH!


SMASH!!
SLLLRRCH!!!


YOU SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL.
I'M NOT HURT.
IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO YOU...





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Artist: Dela Longfish

II

FIRST PLAYABLE

Sometime around the middle of pre-production, creative director Cory Barlog decided to bring a number of the team's experiments together into a first playable. There were several internal teams wrestling with ideas for what the game should look and play like, and Barlog wanted to see how the disparate pieces of the puzzle fit together. There was no level design at this point, so the team started creating little maps to help find the art goals for the demo.

The focus was on two key aspects: to show the relationship between Kratos and his son as he taught him to hunt, and to show the new camera and basic combat with a grunt-type enemy proving out the new weapon.

From the start, there was a strong emotional element to the hunt. Watching Atreus kill the deer and Kratos' ensuing reaction was something the team kept coming back to. "At first we wanted to do something big and epic, but we quickly realized that getting Kratos into a small emotional moment was something much more difficult to pull off than we thought," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish. The team kept refining this concept until getting it to work, and ultimately the strength of that moment ended up leading to the E3 2016 demo.

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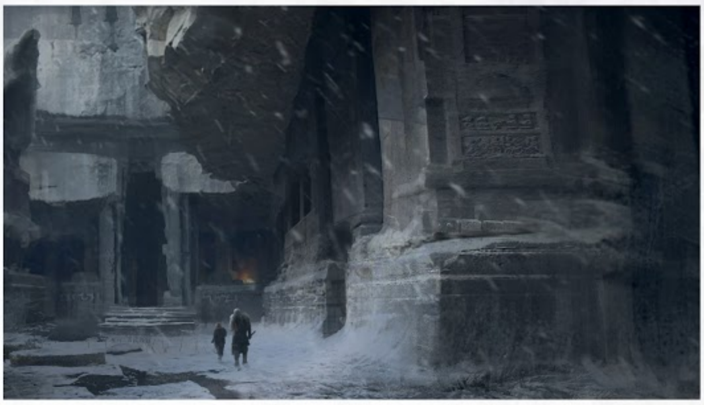
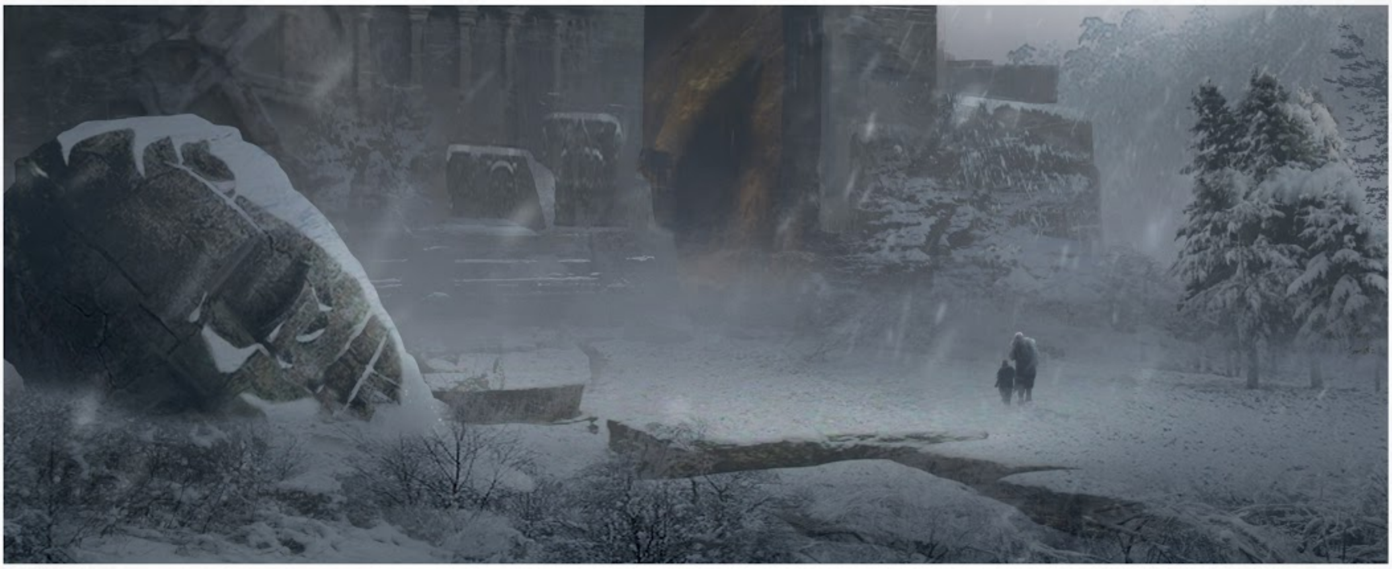
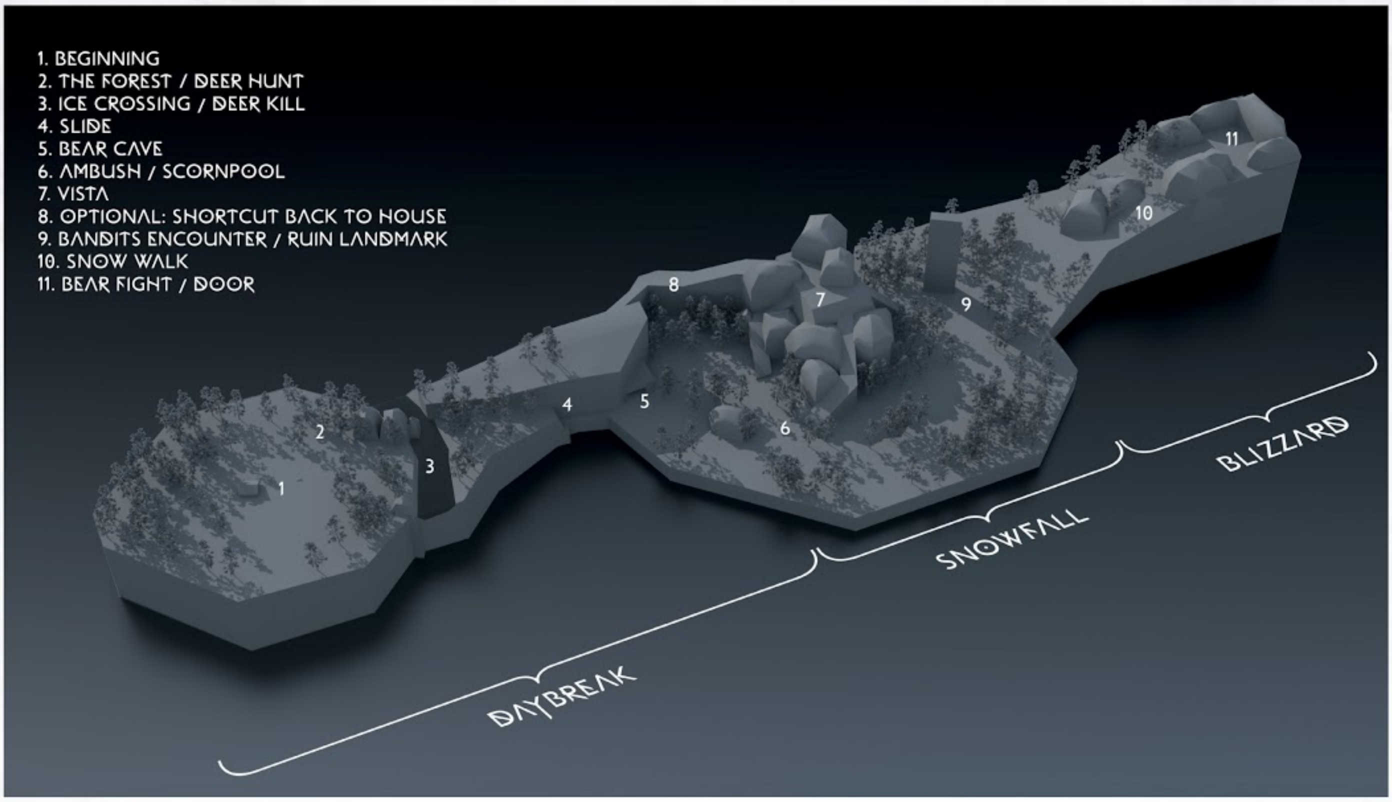
"Early on we made a forest area, and once we were done making it, we looked at it, and it was apparent that it looked like the Sierra Nevada mountain range, not like a Norse forest," said lead environment artist Nate Stephens. The team had done plenty of research, but was drawing from muscle memory.

"One of the guys on our team, Timo Pihlajamaki, is from Sweden, and he was looking at the trees, like, 'those are American trees,'" Stephens continued. "Even when you looked up at the sky, the texture of the clouds just looked like a California sky—not a Norse sky, which is much higher up in the hemisphere, where you get a lot of blues, and pinks, and low light angles. So for a while, the feedback was that the game looked like sunny California, and not enough like a cold, wet Norse environment."

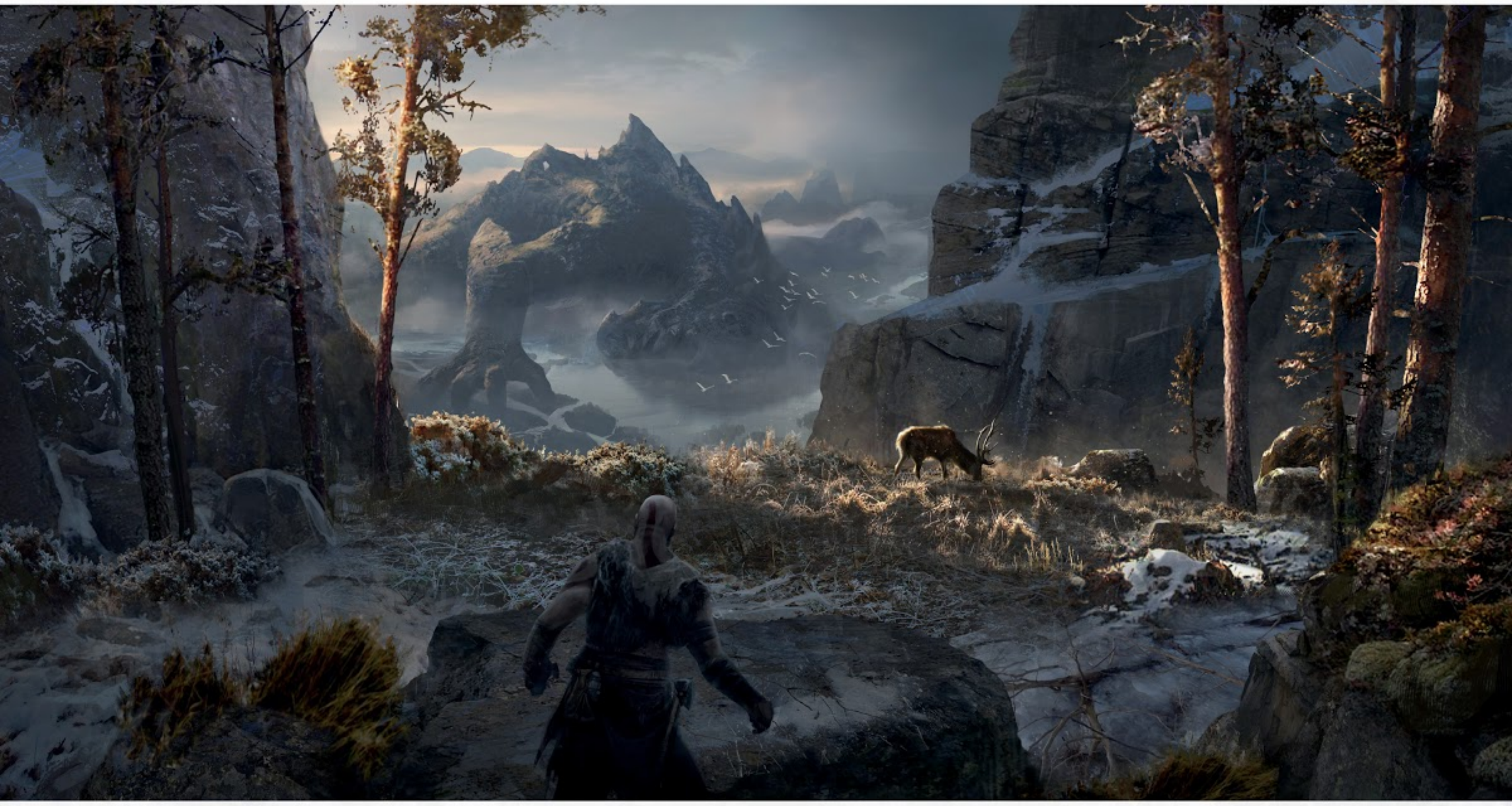




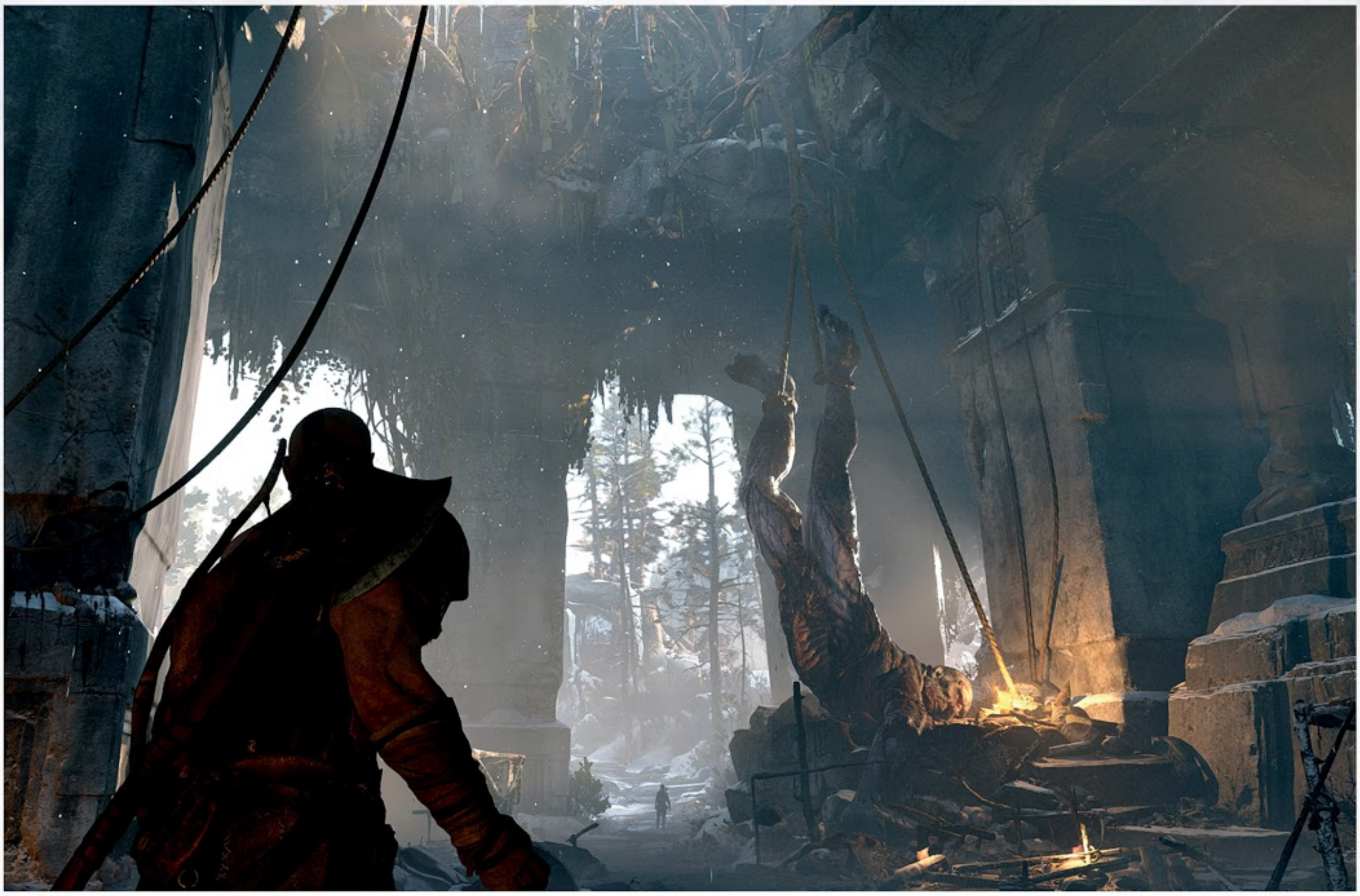
Midgard. Artists: Stéphane Gaudette, Lucas Sparks, Nate Stephens, Dan McKim (bottom); Cliff Childs (top, middle, opposite)

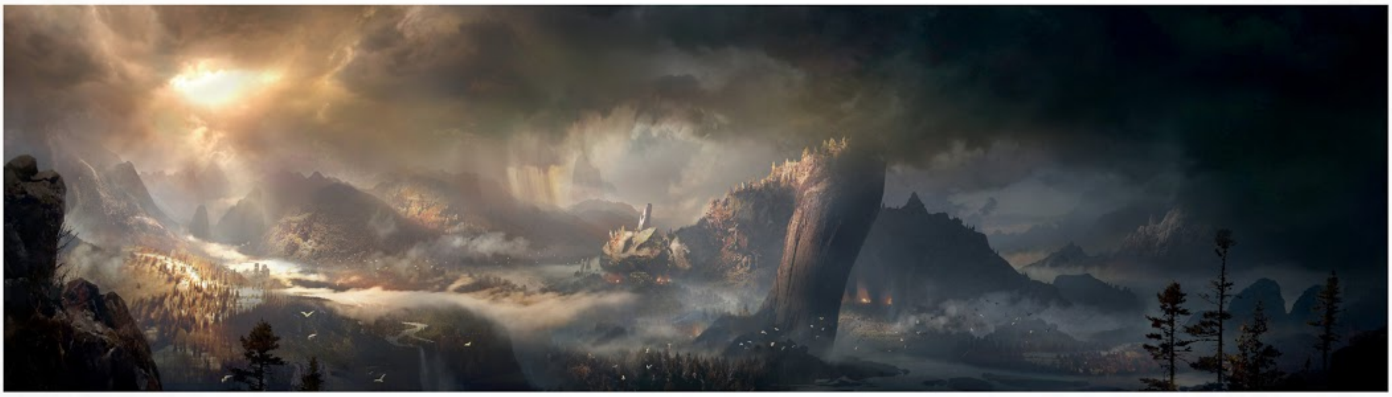

1. BEGINNING
2. THE FOREST / DEER HUNT
3. ICE CROSSING / DEER KILL
4. SLIDE
5. BEAR CAVE
6. AMBUSH / SCORNPOOL
7. VISTA
8. OPTIONAL: SHORTCUT BACK TO HOUSE
9. BANDITS ENCOUNTER / RUIN LANDMARK
10. SNOW WALK
11. BEAR FIGHT / DOOR
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
DAYBREAK
SNOWFALL
BLIZZARD

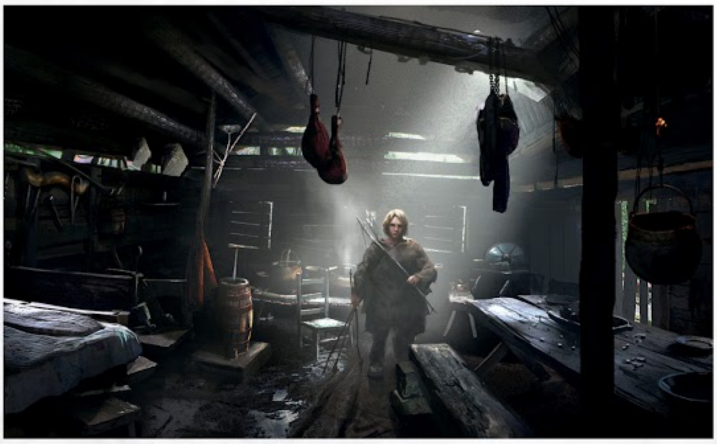
One of the key questions that needed answering from a visual development perspective was: "How do you make a forest feel like it belongs in a *God of War* game?" The team started playing with the idea that maybe the landmasses the player was on were, in fact, giant creatures or temples that had been scattered around. Enough fantasy that when the player didn't see anything other than trees they still felt like they were in a special place.

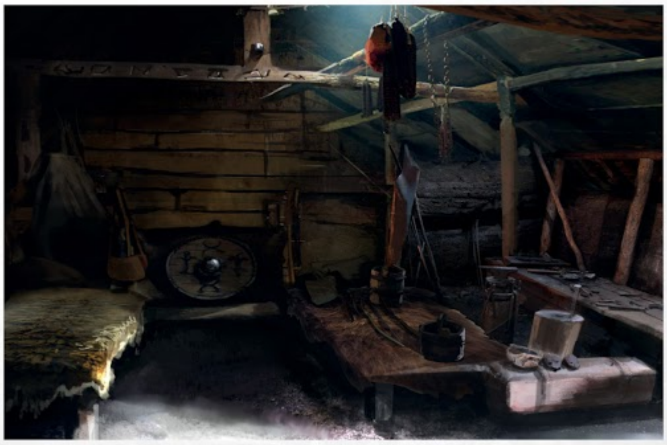


First playable exploration. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Cliff Childs (bottom)





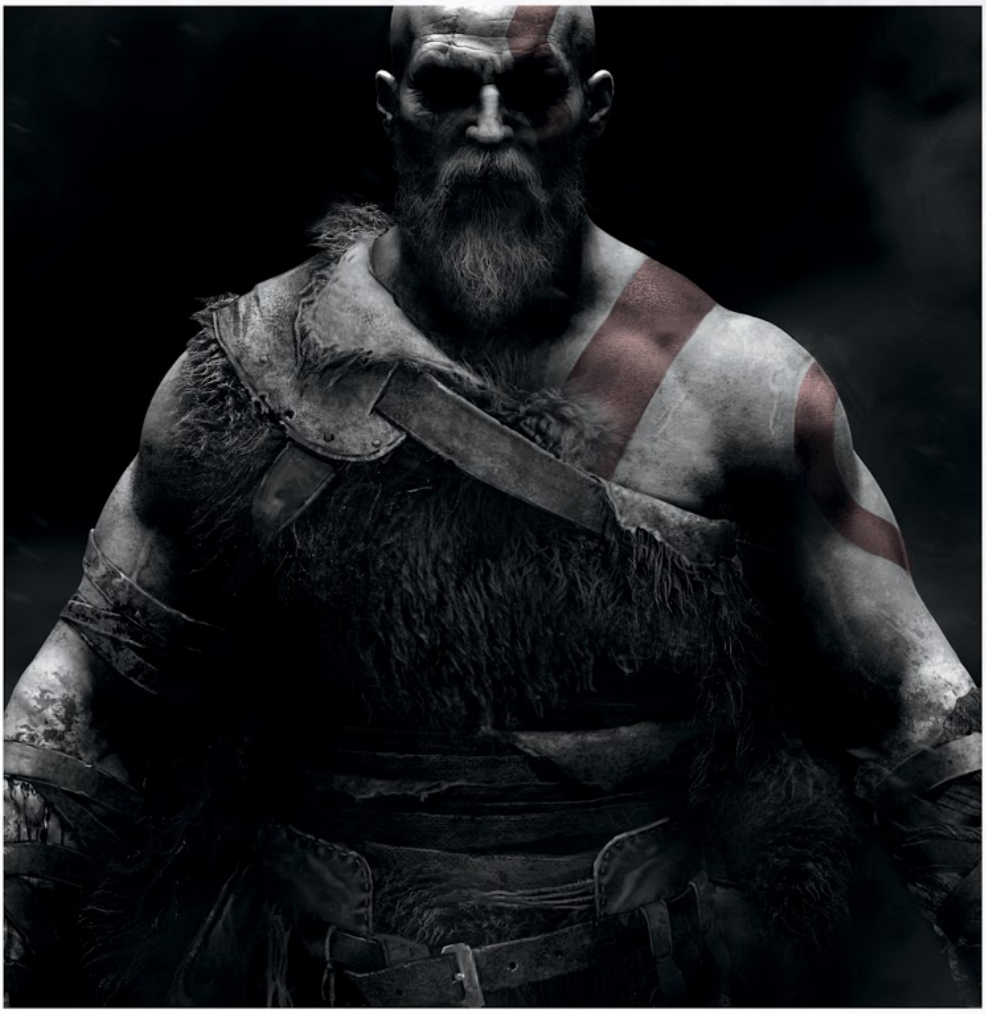


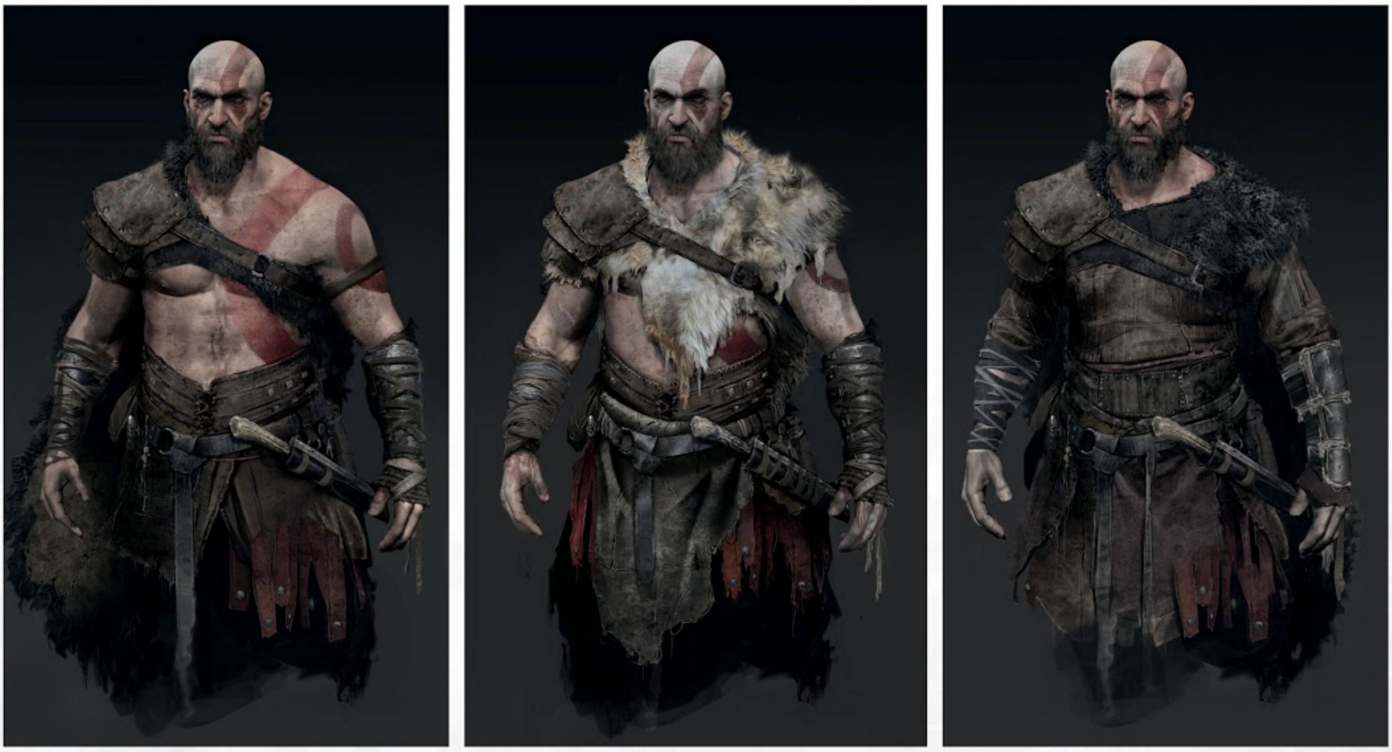


Artists: Lucas Sparks, Isabelle Lemay, Stéphane Gaudette, Nate Stephens (top); Cliff Childs (middle); Jung Ho Park (bottom)

At this time, a significant amount of effort was committed to exploring what a realistic version of Kratos might look like. A great deal of collaboration between the 2-D and 3-D teams took place at this stage. "We were playing with the proportions so Kratos would feel older, but still strong," said Rafael Grassetti.

"The initial idea was that Kratos was supposed to be this 'bear' character and then his son would be smaller, like a wolf," said lead character artist Rafael Grassetti. "So there was this clear contrast between the bear and the wolf. We started putting fur on Kratos, and then on his son, and playing with the color of that fur to help bump the contrast. Throughout development, we always came back to that original bear and wolf notion."

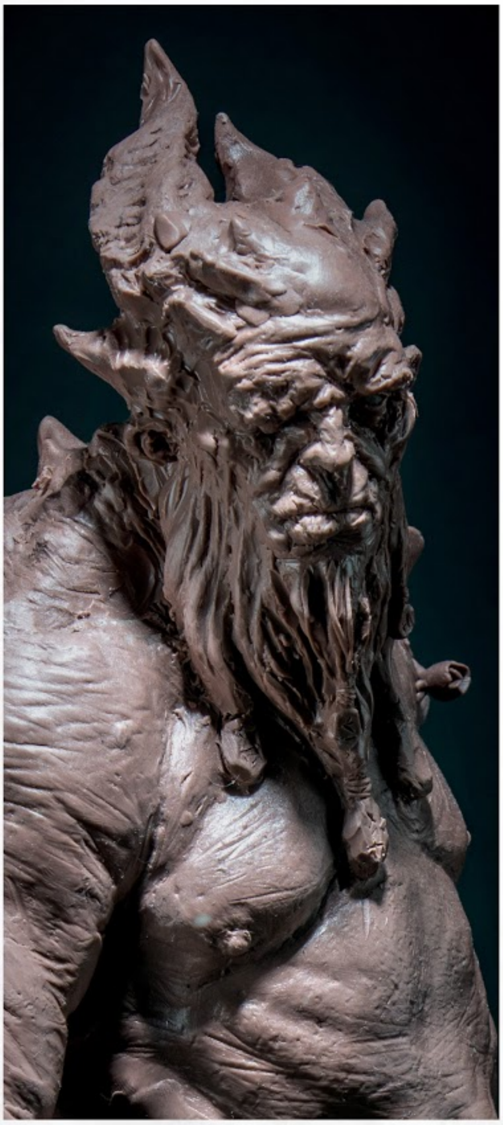


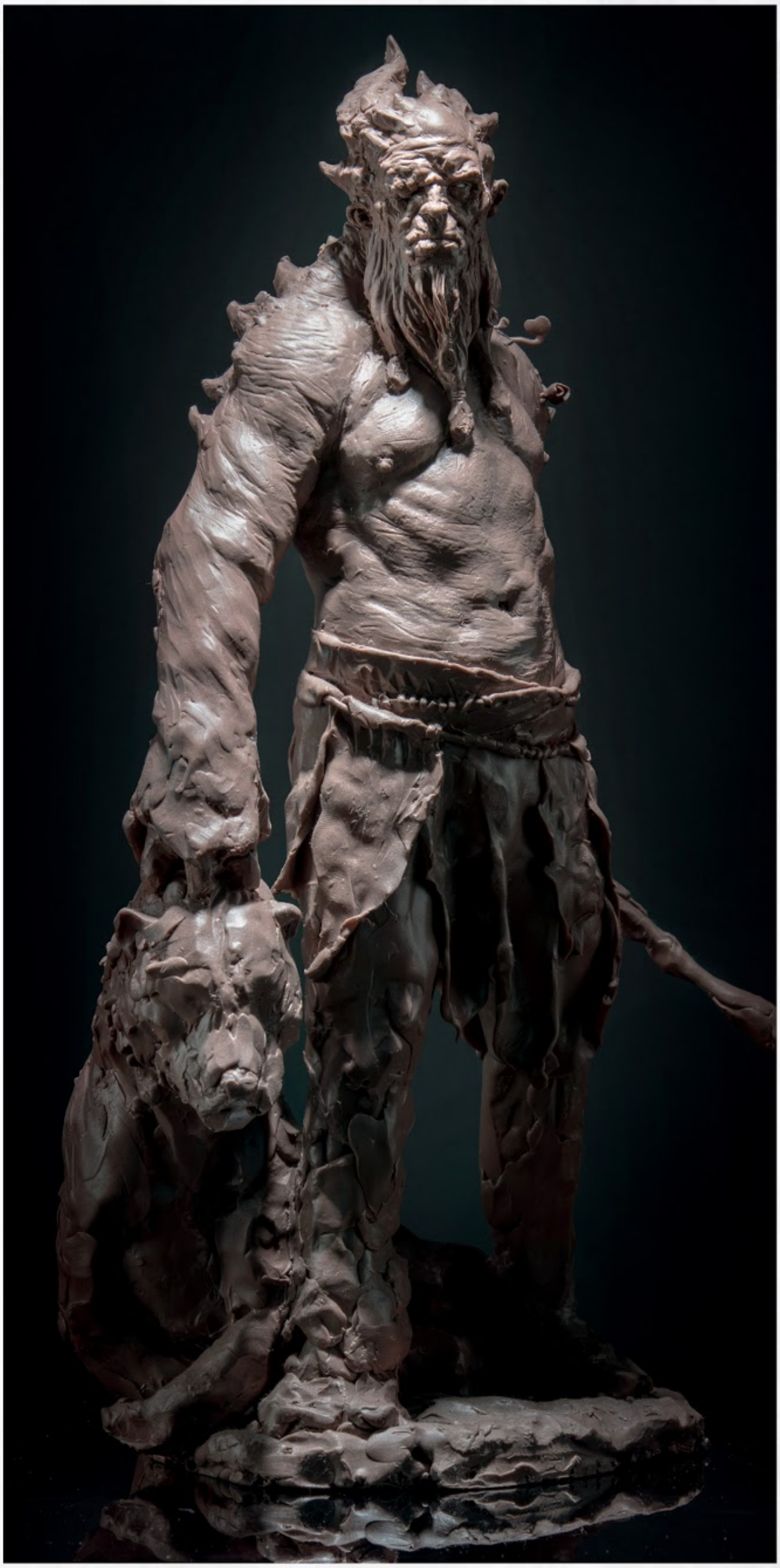


Collaborative 2-D and 3-D development on Kratos. Artists: Rafael Grassetti, Dela Longfish

Artist: Rafael Grassetti

Rafael Grassetti sculpted these clay Troll maquettes as the team explored the creatures' design. These pieces serve as a prime example of the collaborative relationship that exists within the art department, since Dela Longfish initiated the process with pencil sketches which Grassetti then used as inspiration for his sculpture. He captured a wonderful candid pose with the Troll standing triumphant after a hunt, not only hinting at the character's personality, but using the corpse of the bear to communicate the size and danger of the Trolls within this world.

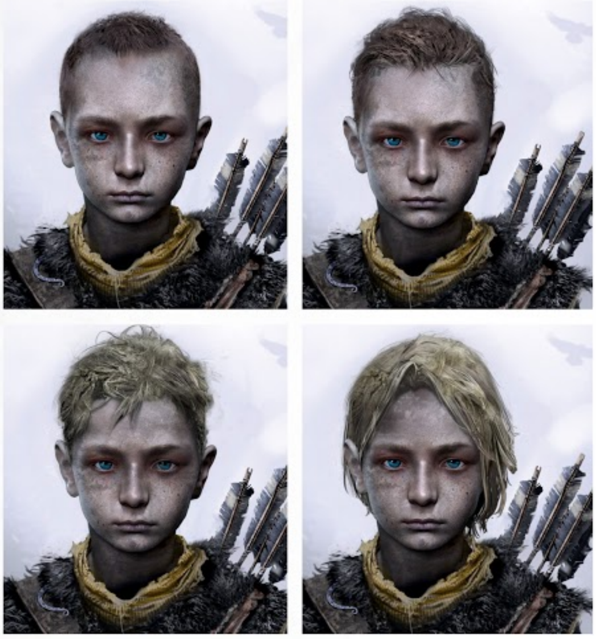


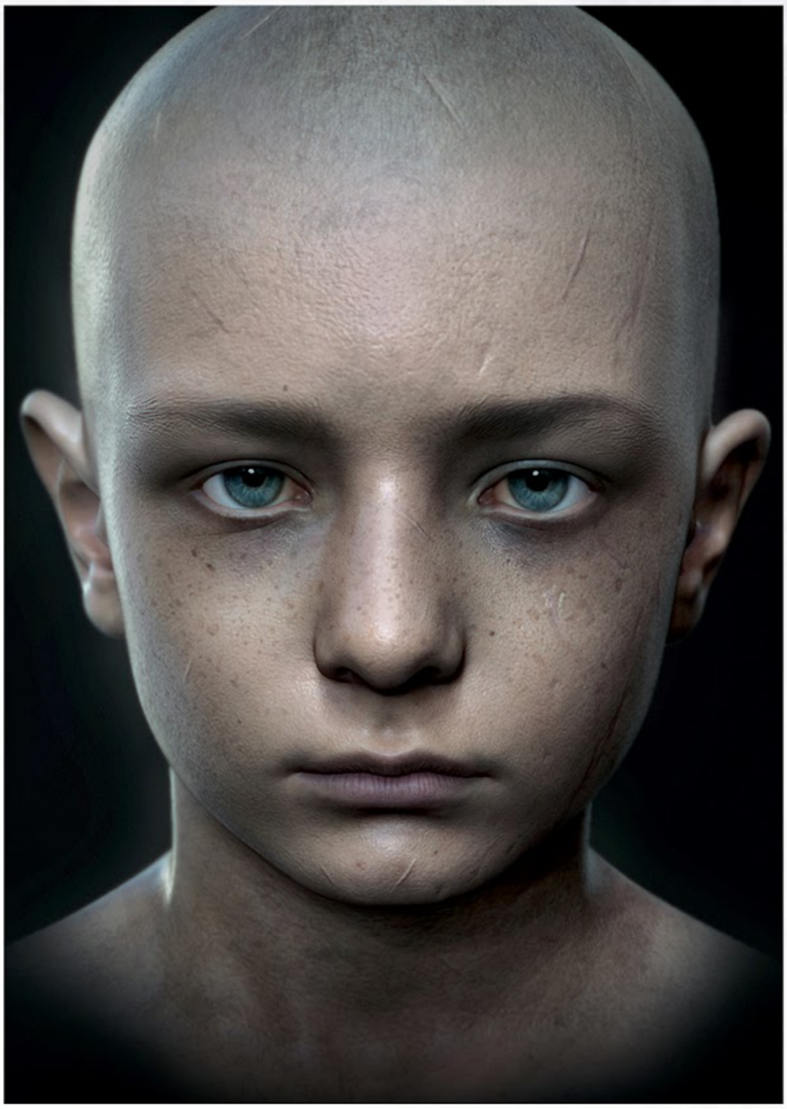


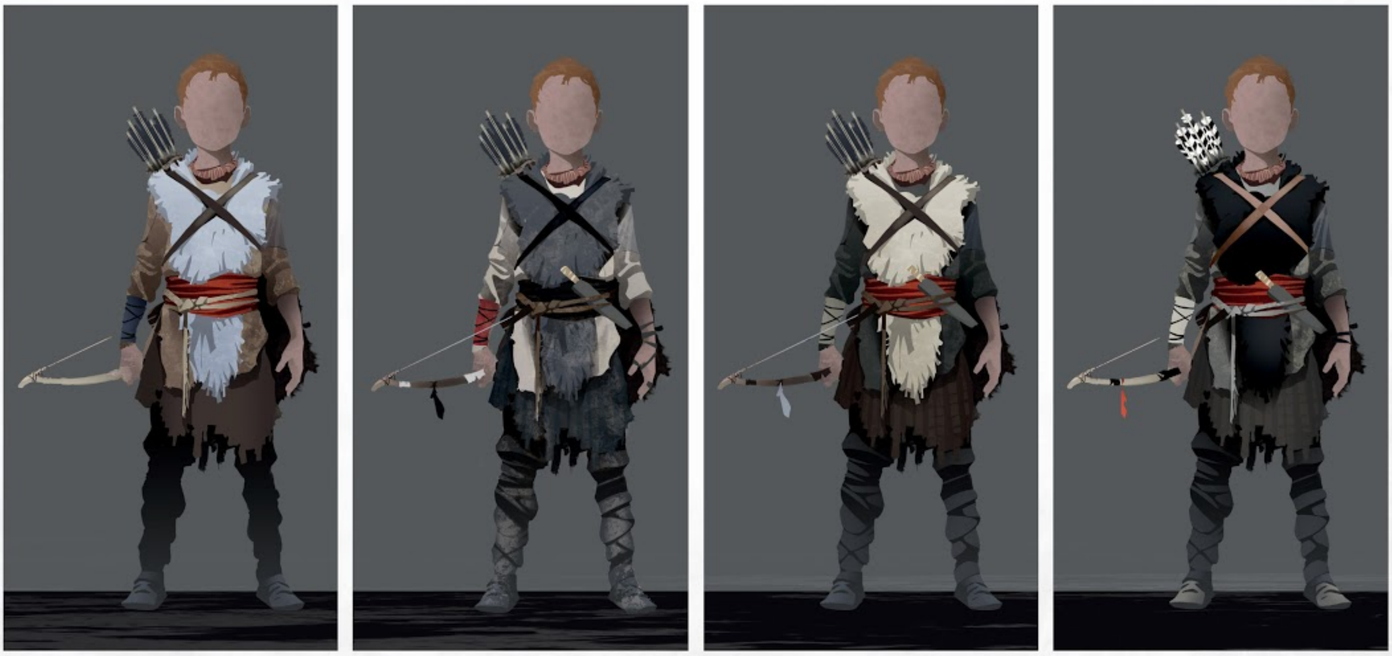
Hand-sculpted Troll maquette. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (sculptor), James Rulison (photographer); Cliff Childs (opposite)

Here we see the design of Atreus finally coming into focus. Kratos is not "of this world," but Atreus is—and the team wanted his costume to reflect this. Atreus also carries mementos from both his mother and father at all times; the yellow scarf is from his mother (a color which represents her character in the game), while the red sash around his waist is the same one Kratos wore in the previous *God of War* games.

One of the final elements that helped the team round out this design was the addition of the actor Sunny Suljic, who portrays Atreus in the game. "The initial idea was that Atreus would be a more sickly character," said Rafael Grassetti. "Early on we had designs where his hair had fallen out—he still has a bunch of scars on his face to show what he's been through in his childhood."



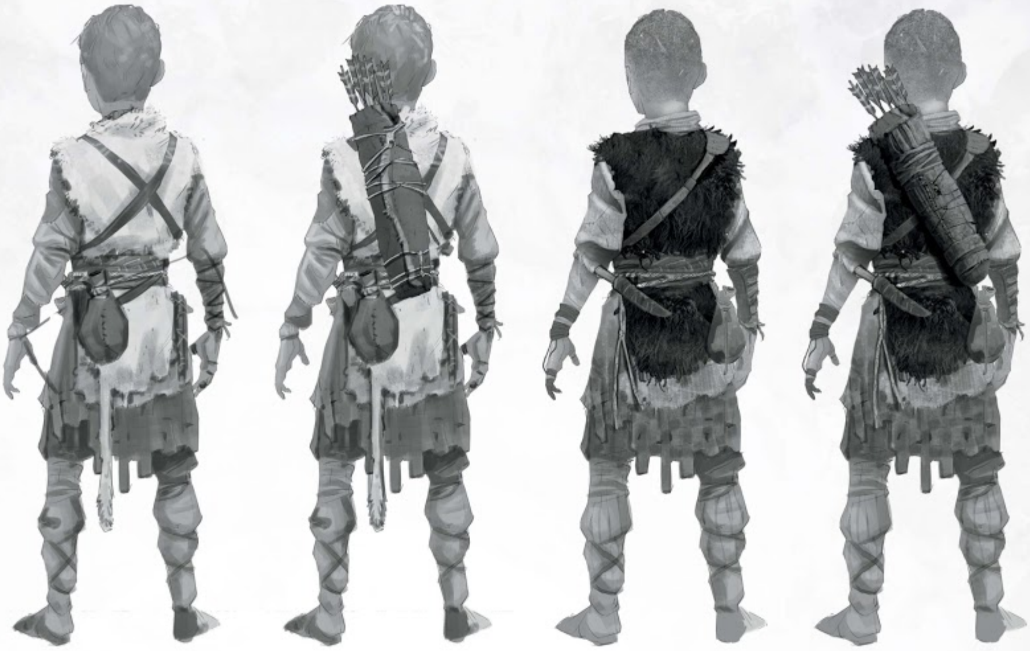


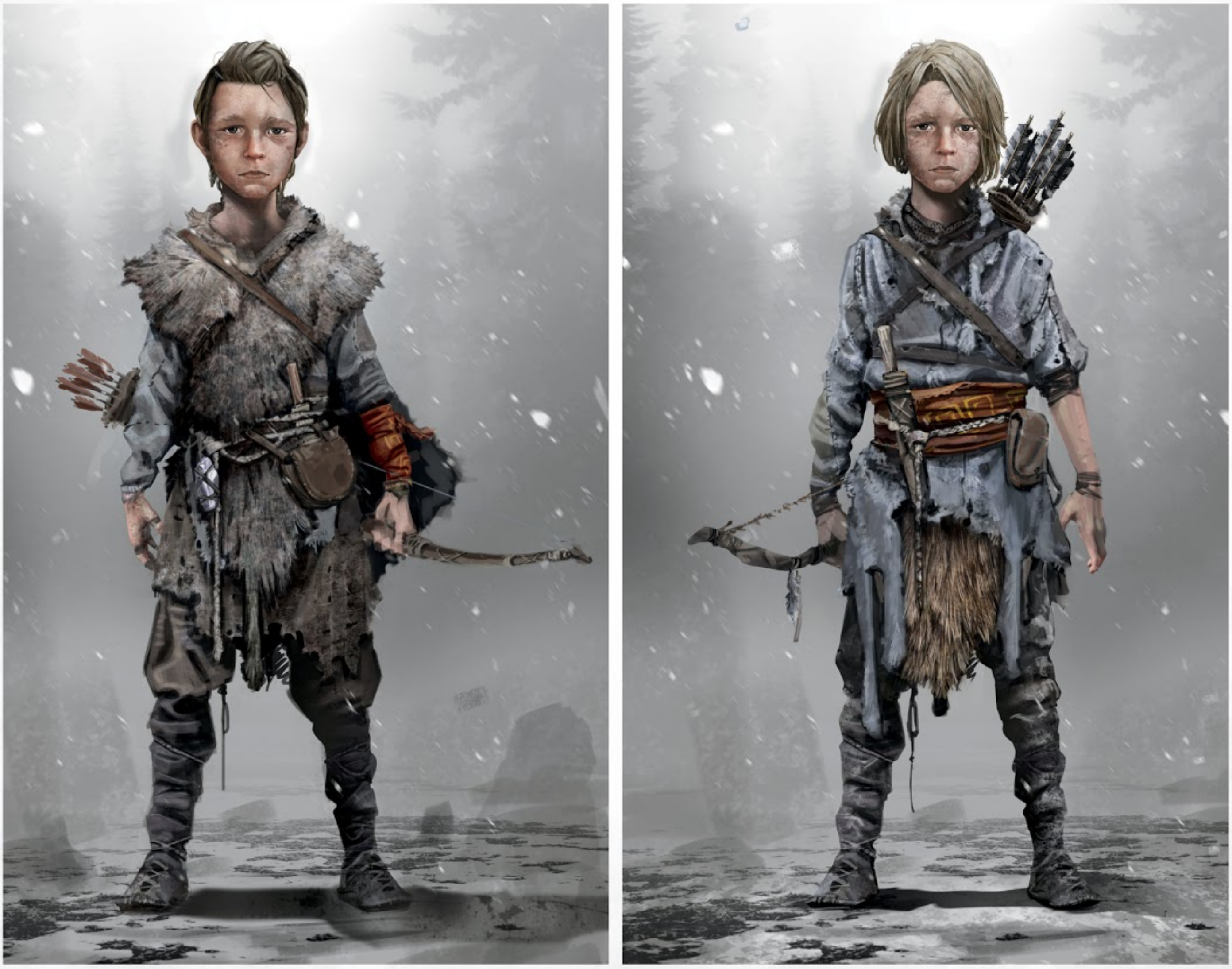


Narrowing in on the design of Atreus. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top right); Dela Longfish (this page, opposite)

Here we see more costume explorations for Atreus. An important consideration in video games is how the player sees the character. Since the game uses a third-person over-the-shoulder camera, making sure the back of the character is just as visually pleasing as the front is of crucial importance.

“The son was easier to design than Kratos, because we could just do something from scratch,” said Rafael Grassetti. “There was a lot of research into historical references, and then we started playing with costumes and playing with simple shapes until we had something unique with just a basic silhouette.”

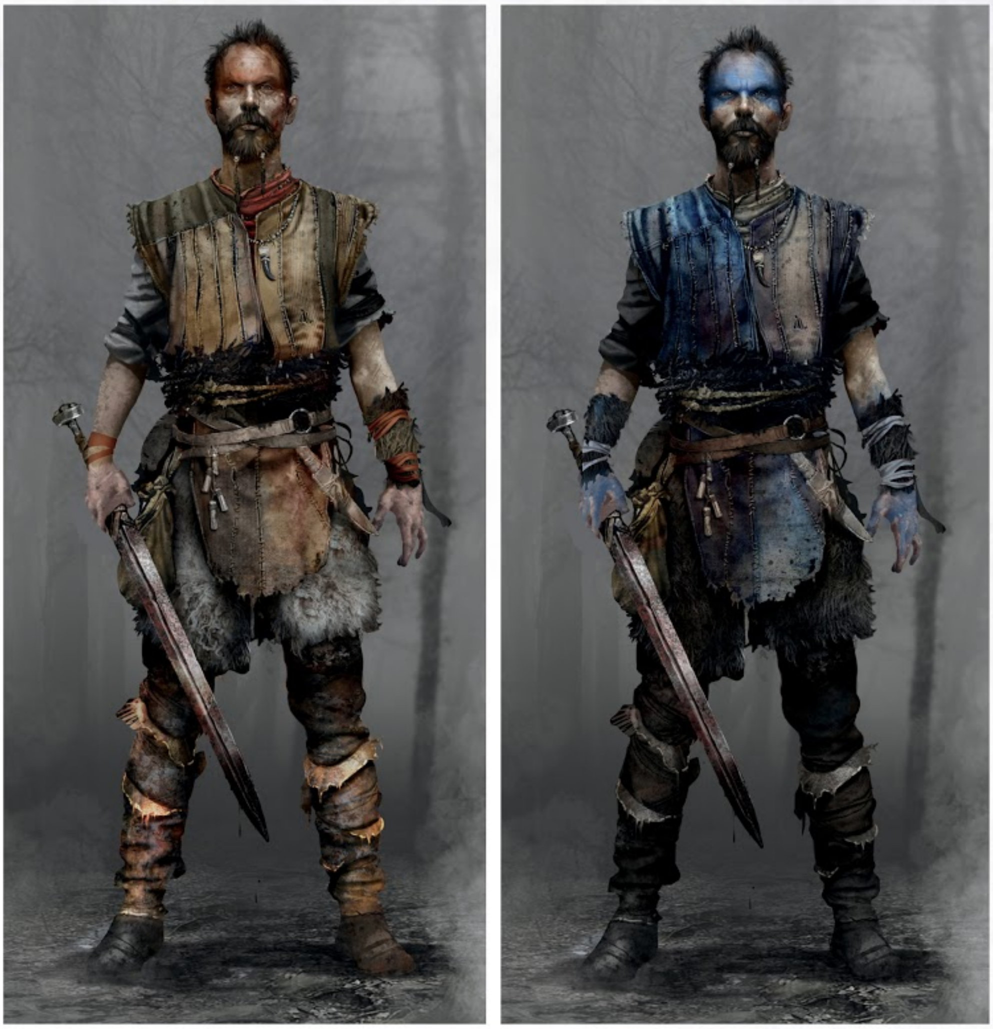


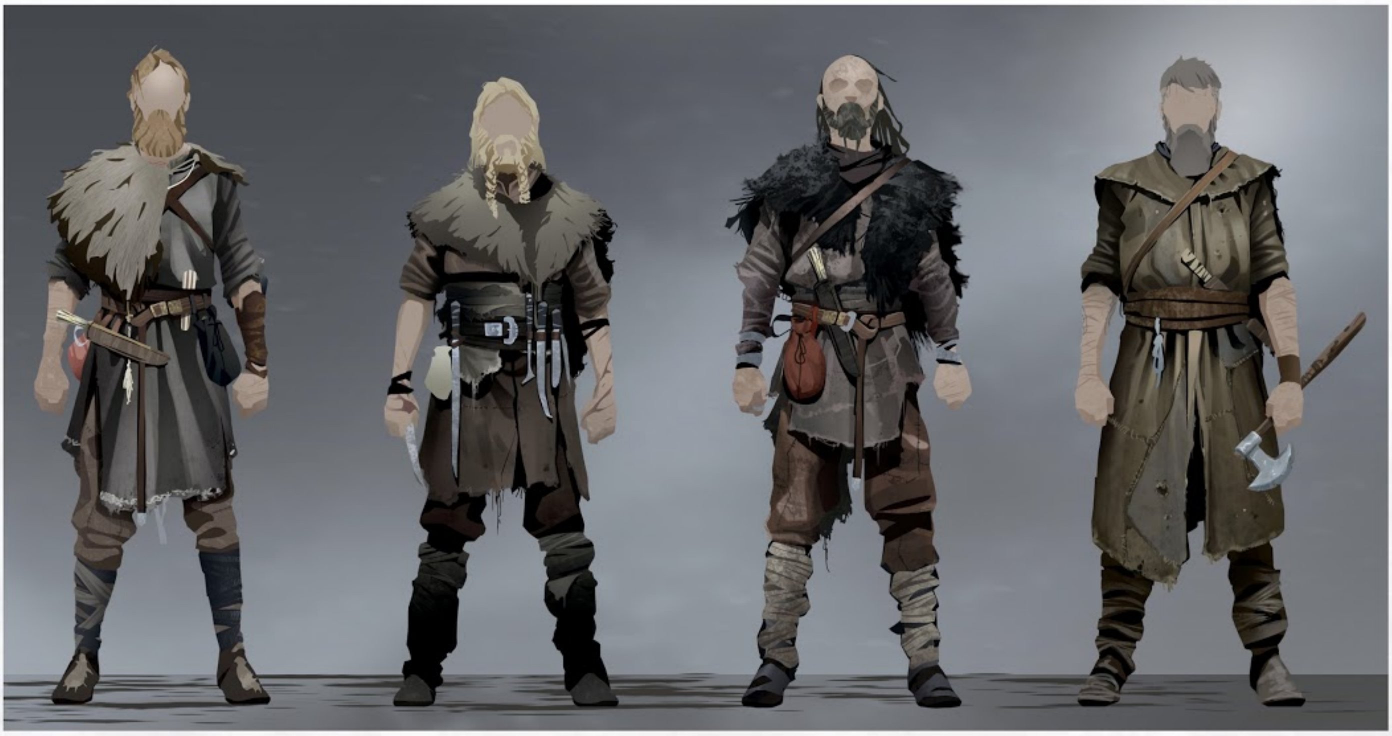


Working out Atreus’ costume details. Artist: Dela Longfish (this page, opposite)

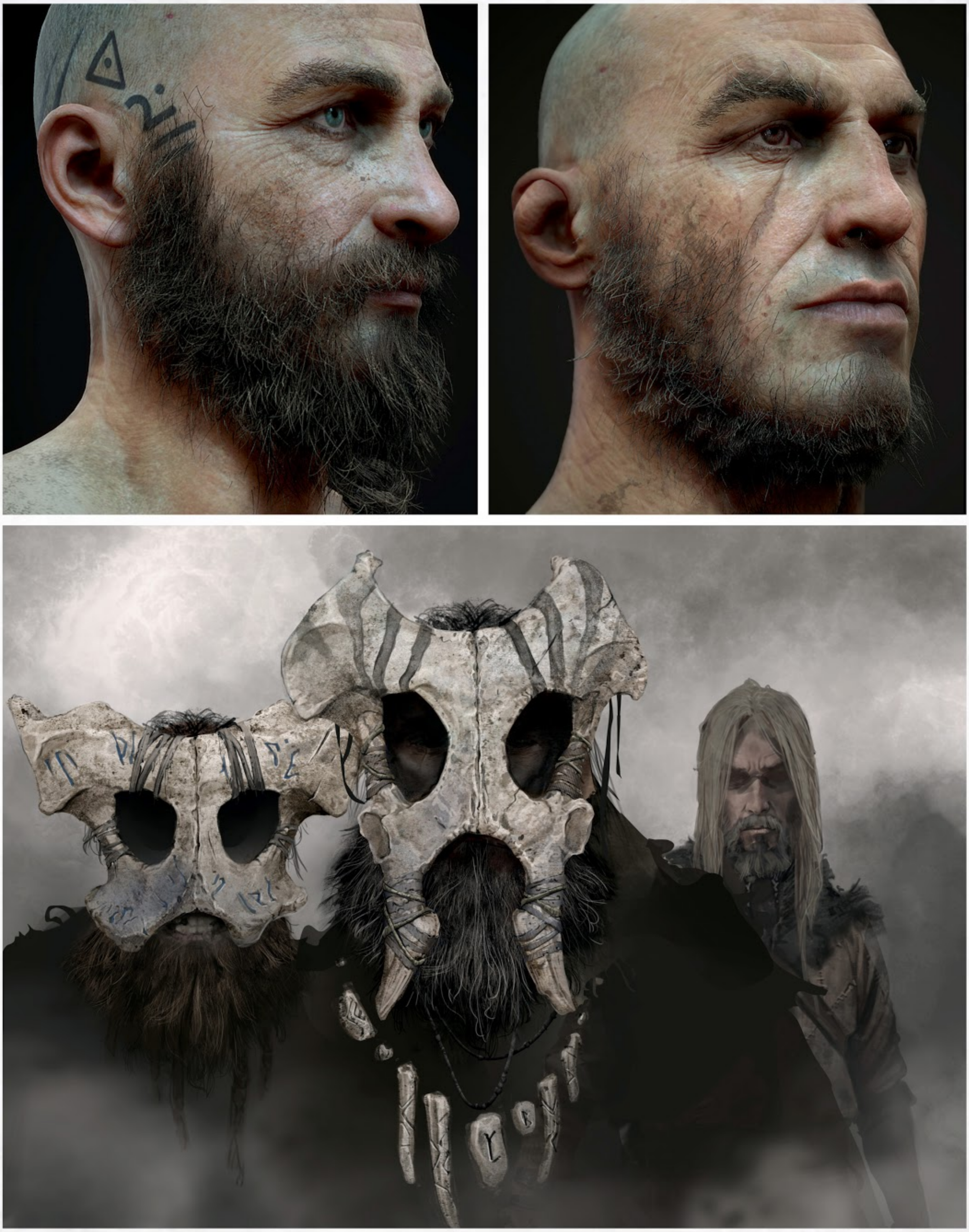
Early on, the Nomads were designed as very grounded characters that were meant to contrast the more fantastic elements of the game. Their clothing and designs were influenced by the materials the team imagined they would find in their surroundings. As with many designs, however, these characters would evolve over the course of the project.

To ensure that they read well in the game, the team reduced designs to simple graphic shapes to see if their clarity held up at a very low level of detail.

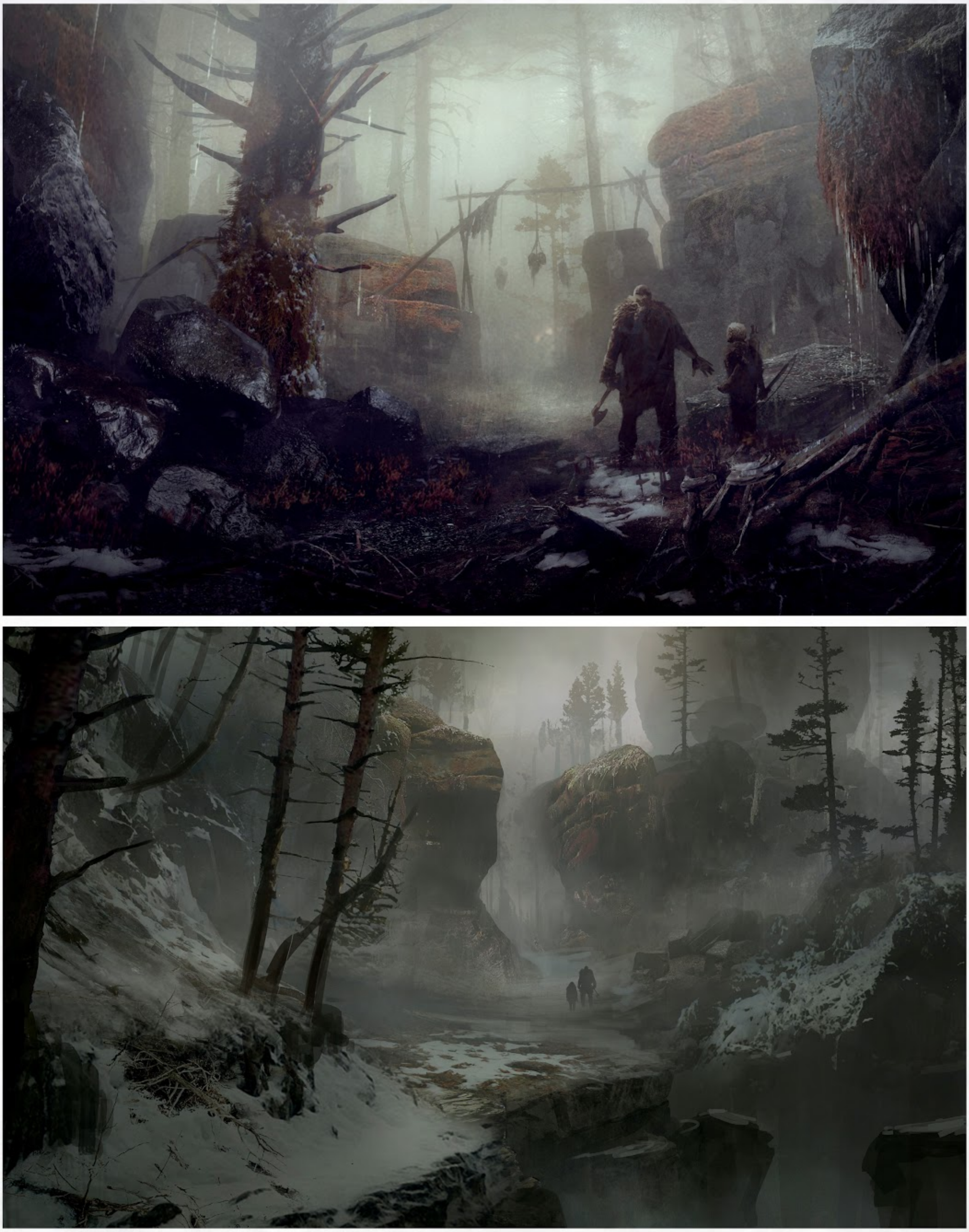




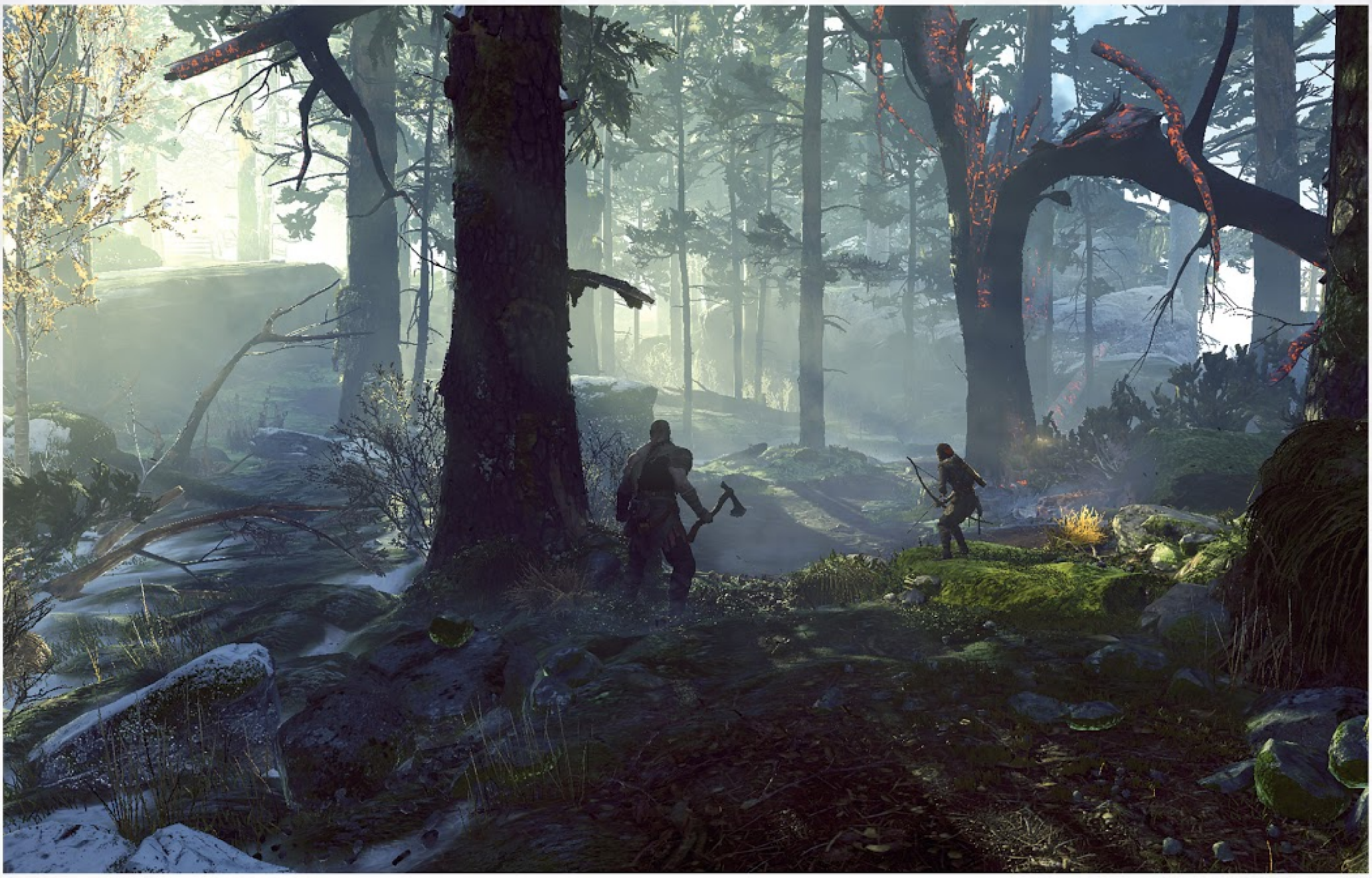
Humans of the world, Nomad exploration. Artist: Dela Longfish

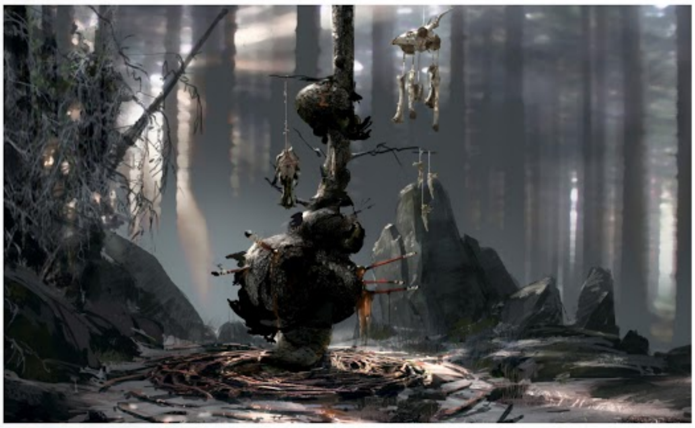


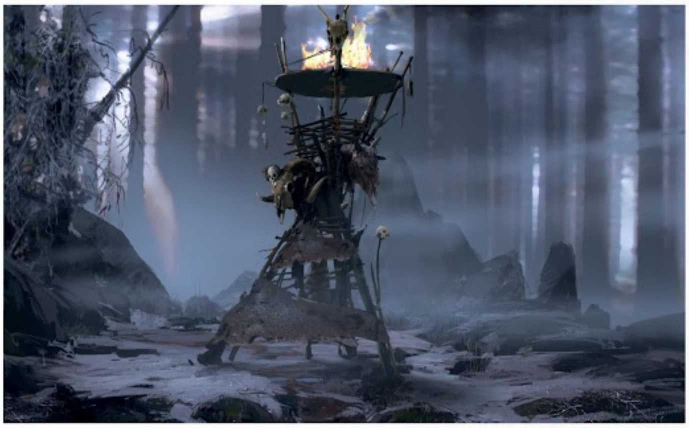
Development renders of Nomads. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top); Dela Longfish (bottom)

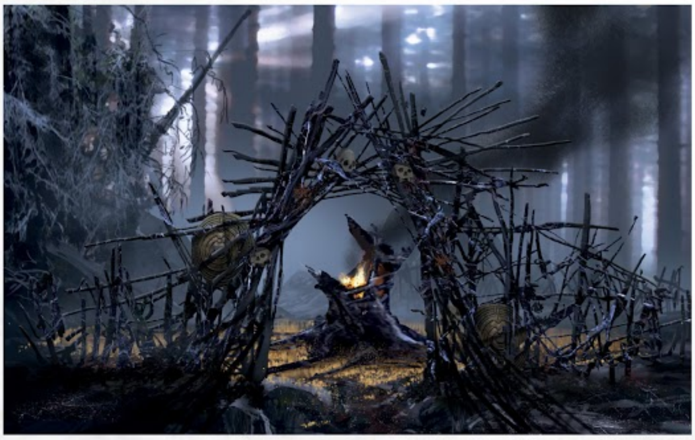


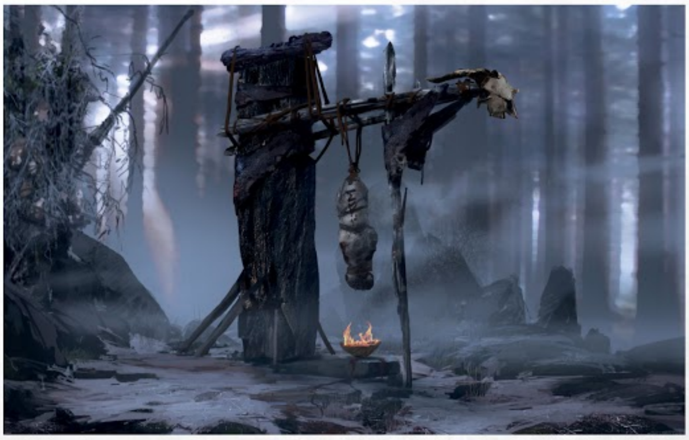
Finding Midgard. Artist: Cliff Childs



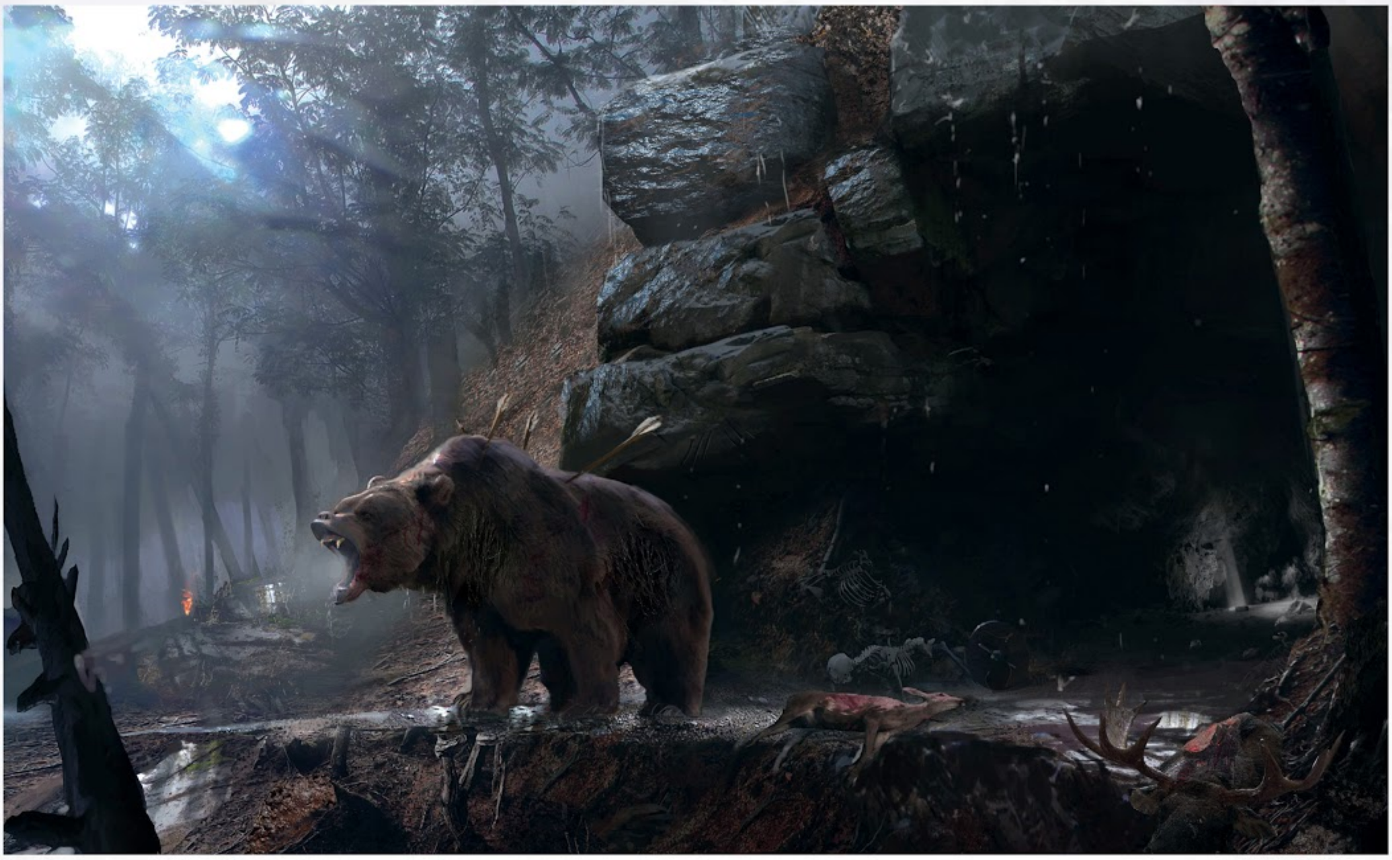


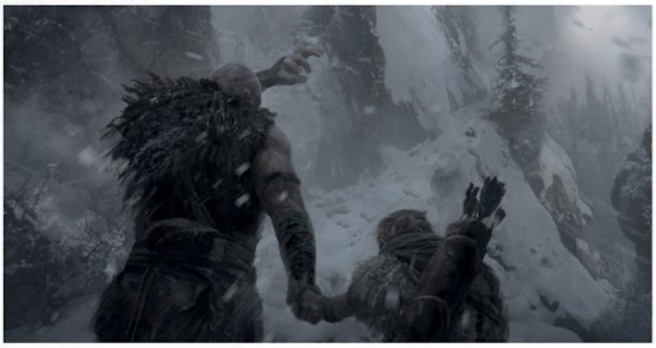


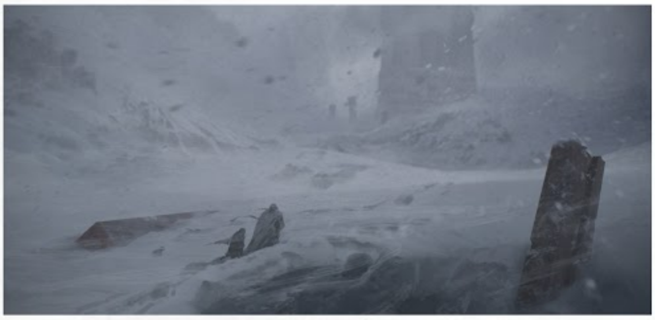




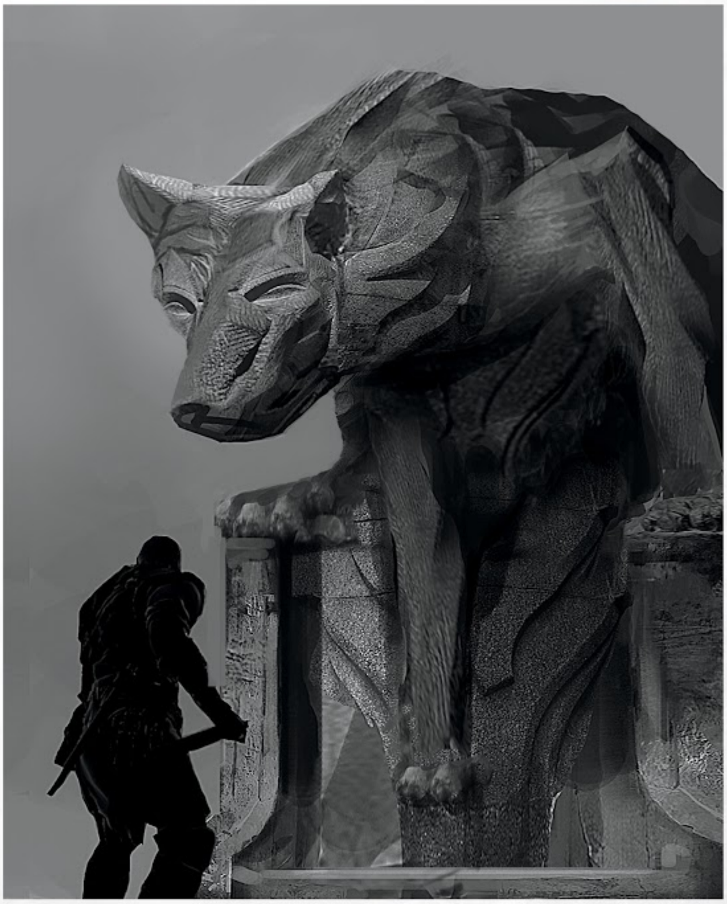
Artists: Dan McKim, Mariusz Wiechec, Nate Stephens (top); Luke Berliner



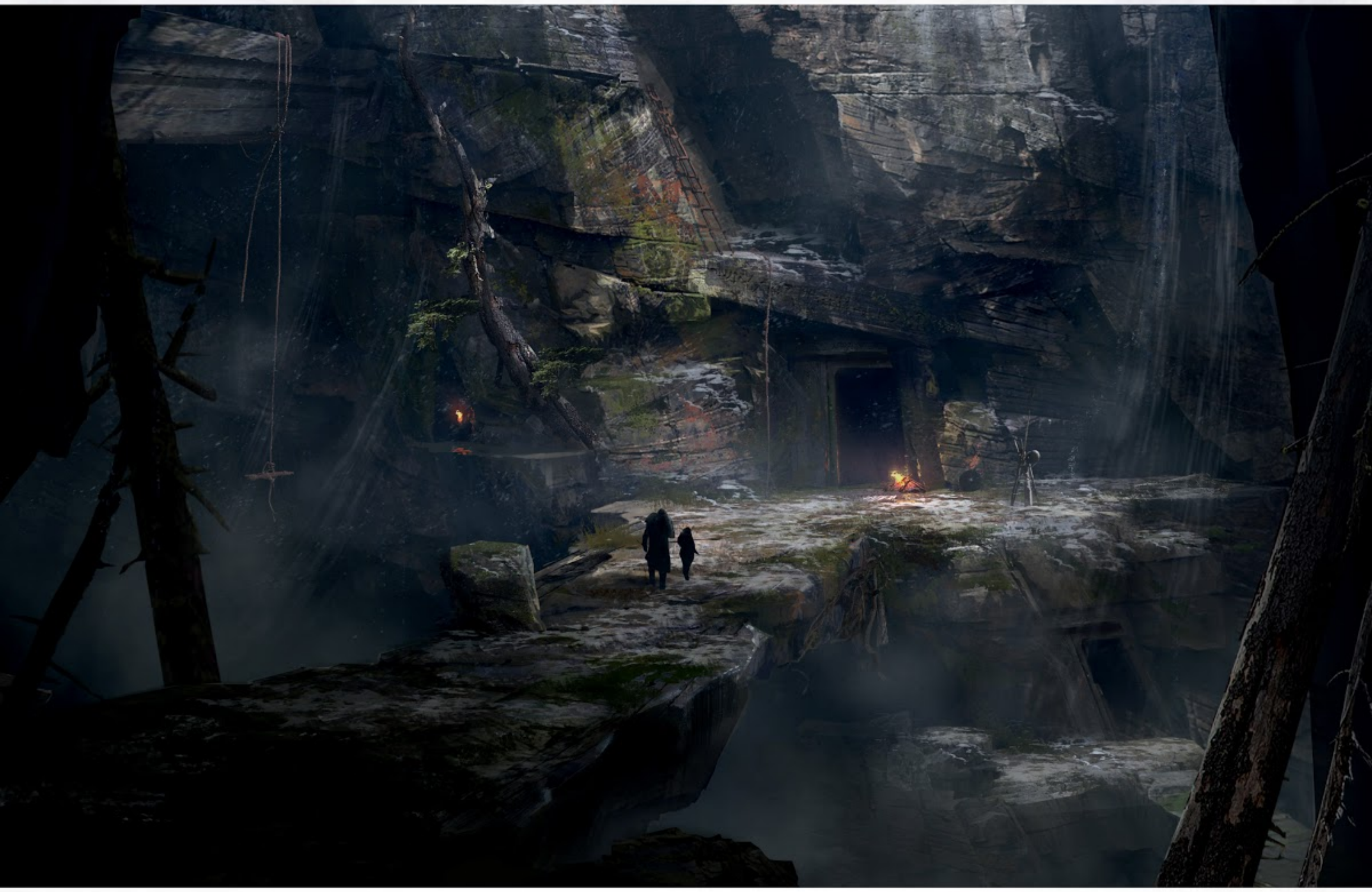


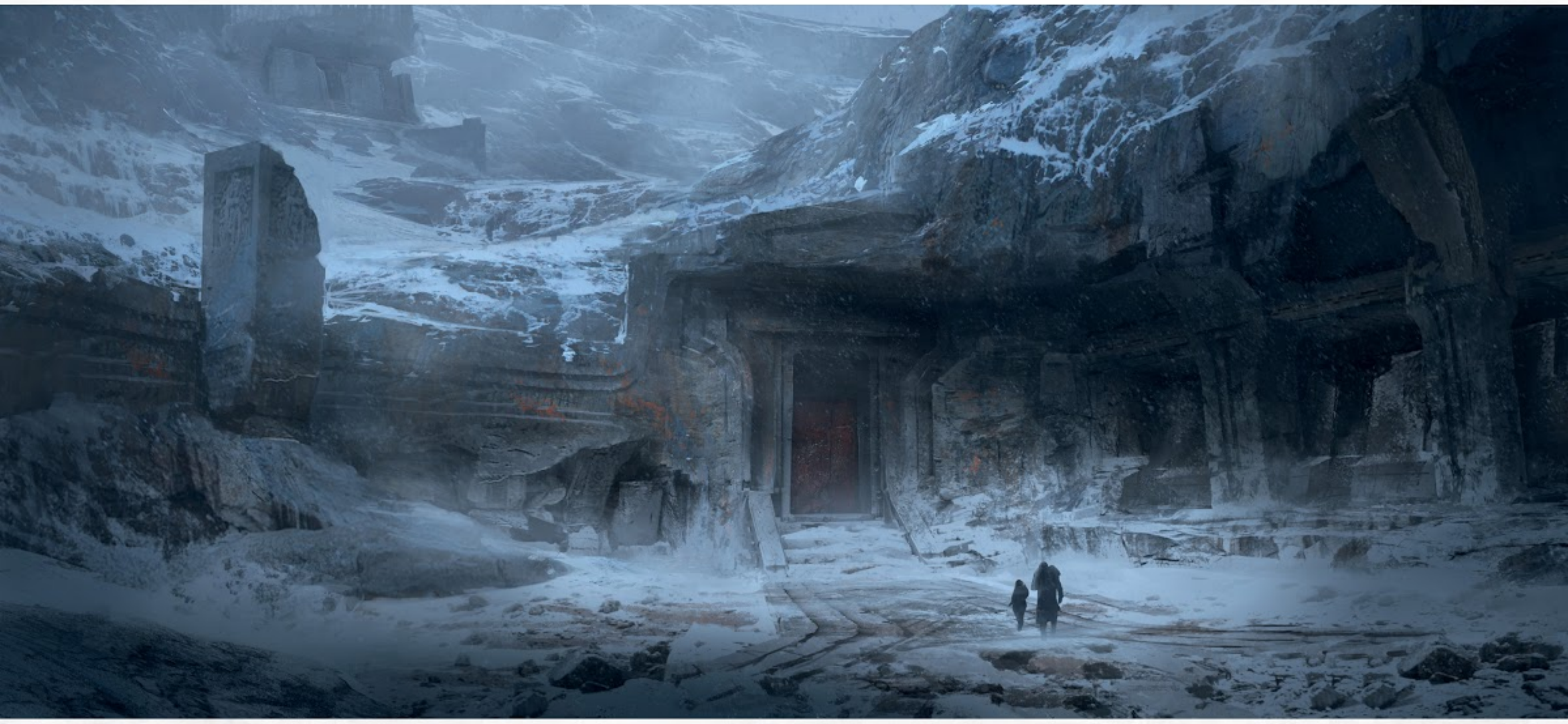


Concept artist Jung Ho Park helped nail down the aesthetic for *God of War*'s statues with this wolf statue design. The team wanted to see what it would look like if they went for a style that was more planar and emotional, rather than anatomically accurate. "Coming from the Greek games we thought this would mark a strong departure," said lead concept artist Luke Berliner. "We also wanted to pull from the rich design work found in Viking artifacts."

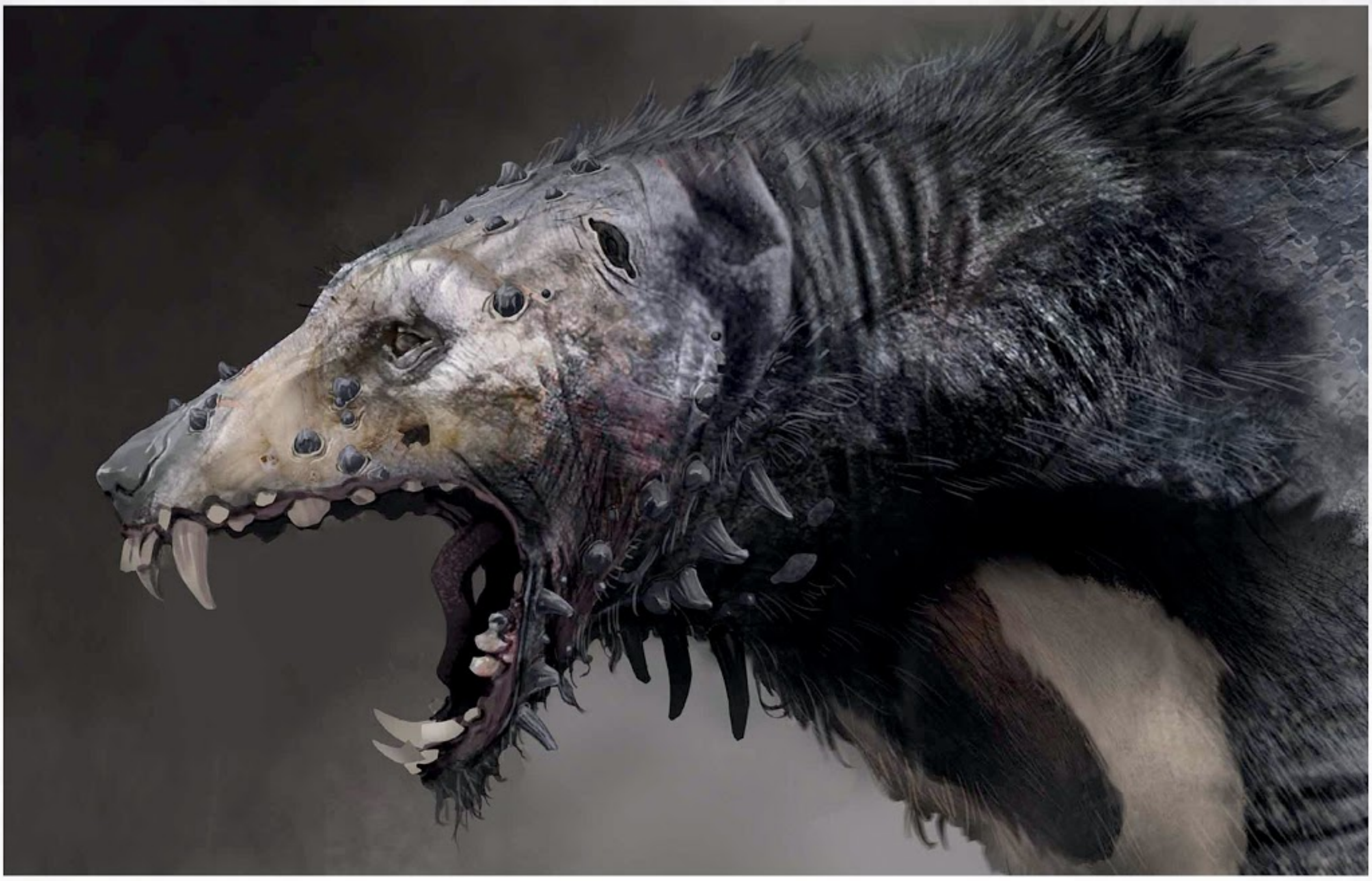


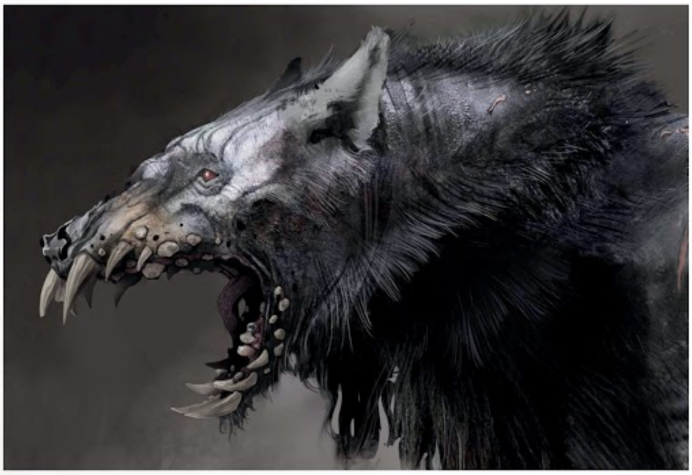
Mysteries of Midgard. Artists: Jung Ho Park (top, bottom); Cliff Childs, Luke Berliner (middle)

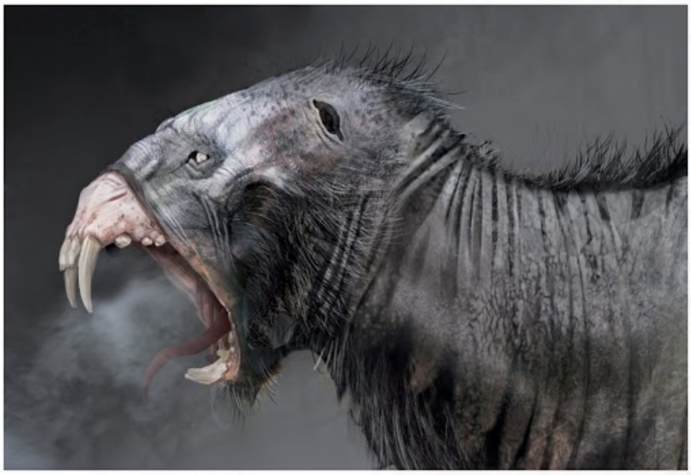


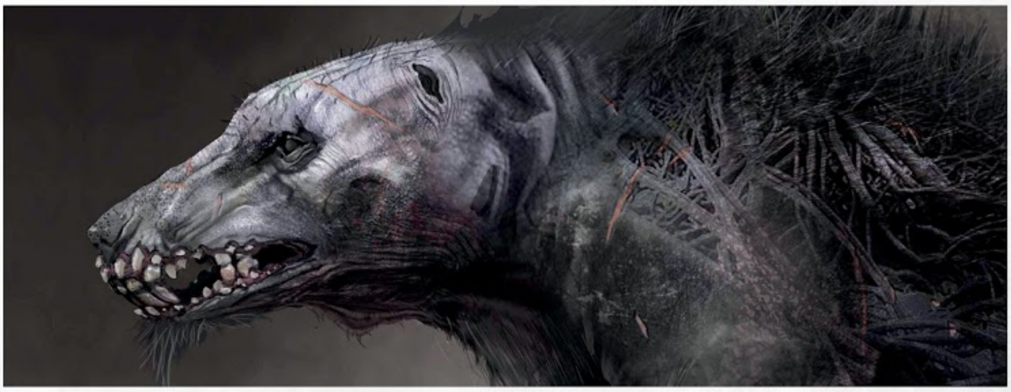


The door in the mountain. Artist: Luke Berliner









These are concepts for a creature called the Wulver. An aggressive creature that can stand like a man or run on all four legs like a wolf—a kind of Norse werewolf.

Further explorations of Norse creatures. Artist: Dela Longfish

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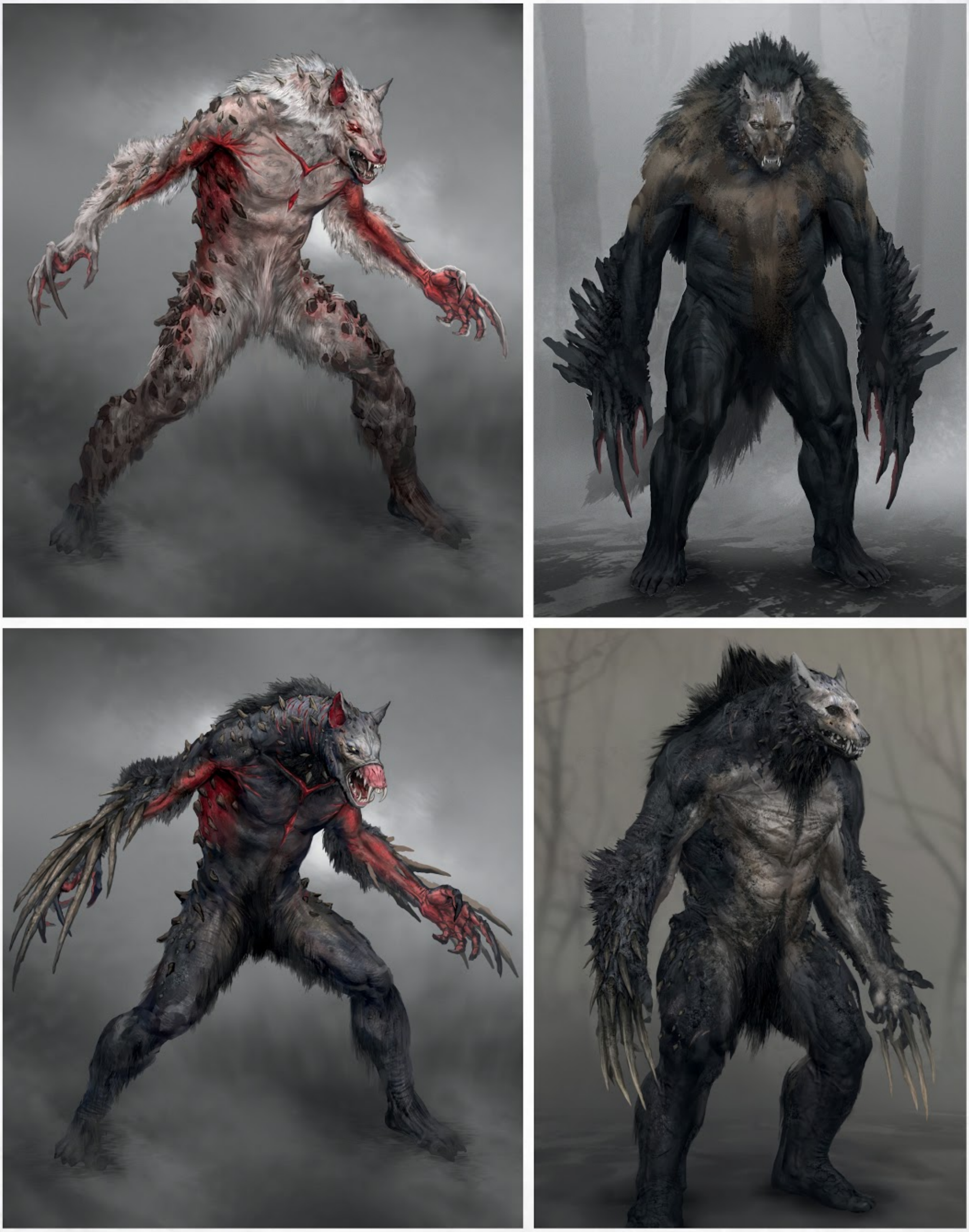
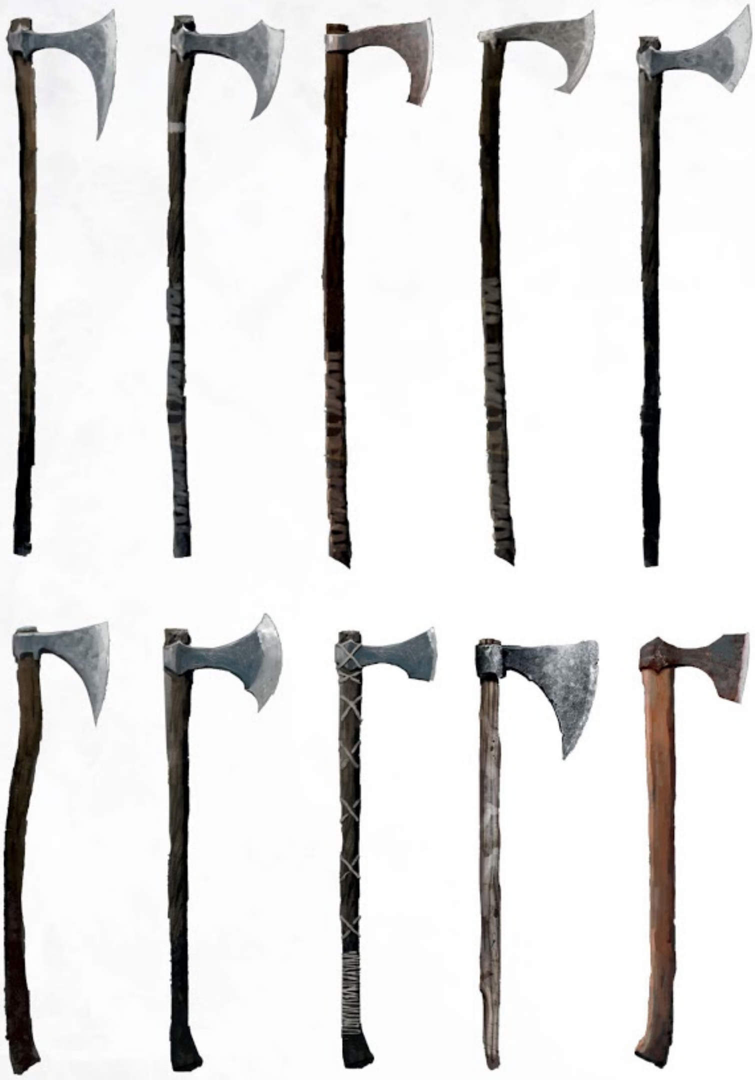
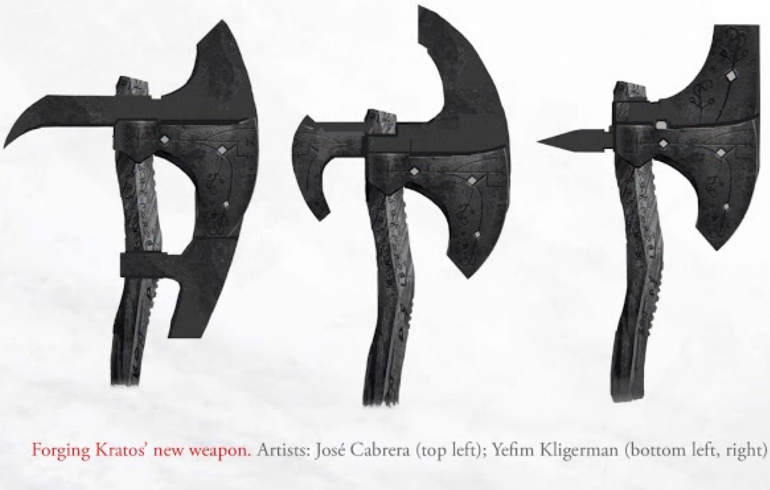
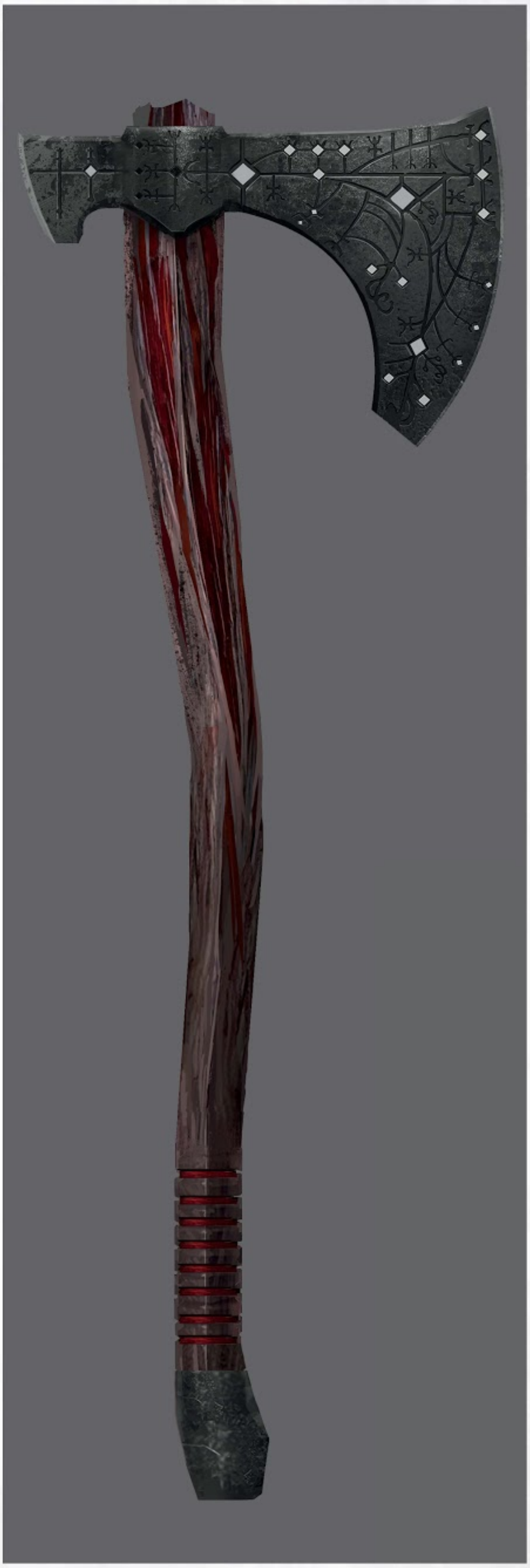


Wulver exploration. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

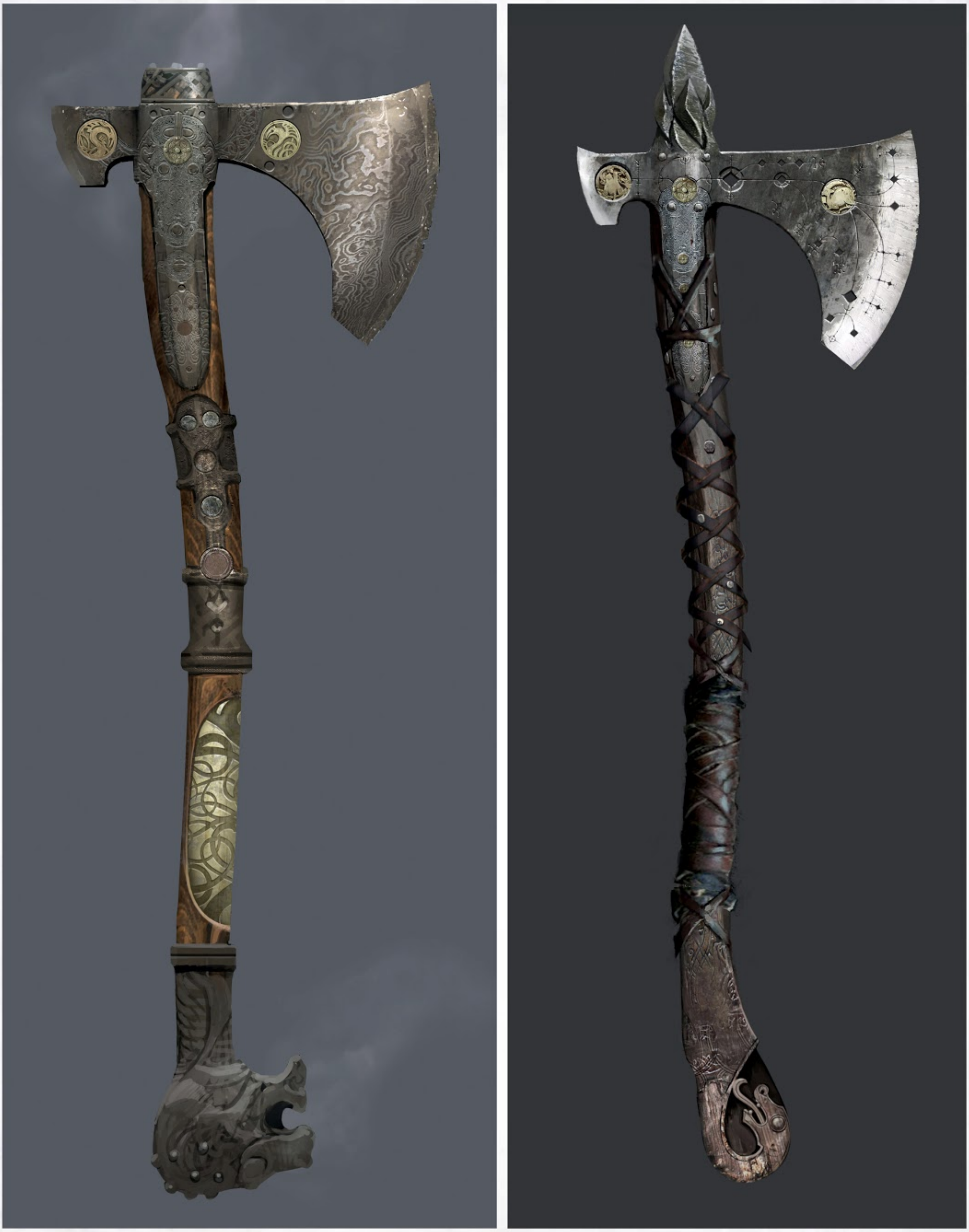
Almost as important as the game's dual heroes is Kratos' new weapon, his Leviathan Axe. With the Blades of Chaos from the previous game serving as such an iconic part of Kratos' character, the challenge was to create a new weapon that had the same presence and appeal. The team wanted a weapon that was believable and clearly from this new world, but one that also stood out as special and somewhat fantastic. And, like the game's heroes, the Axe itself has a history that's revealed throughout the game.







Forging Kratos' new weapon. Artists: José Cabrera (top left); Yefim Kligerman (bottom left, right)



Artists: Vance Kovacs (left); José Cabrera (right)

Artist: Mark Castanon

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III

OPENING UP THE WORLD

As the development team wrapped up its first *God of War* playable, the dust was beginning to settle on the narrative side. Story details were being locked down, and it was time to dig into the main game. Two levels became initial points of focus: "The Mountain"—a large, vertical, cavernous dungeon with a dragon—and "Álfheim," the realm of the elves. With a great deal of effort and much iteration, Álfheim represented the first time the team started to nail down what another realm would look and feel like.

Things were also ramping up on the visual development side as that team worked to support the main team's new goals, while simultaneously continuing to explore the creatures, characters, and locations they wanted to include in the game. High vision work is extremely important to the concept artists, even if a given piece of work isn't used directly in the game. It often helps to inspire level design, and provides a preview of the aesthetic choices the artists intend to make. This means that when the design for a given item is ready, the subsequent work can be executed much faster.

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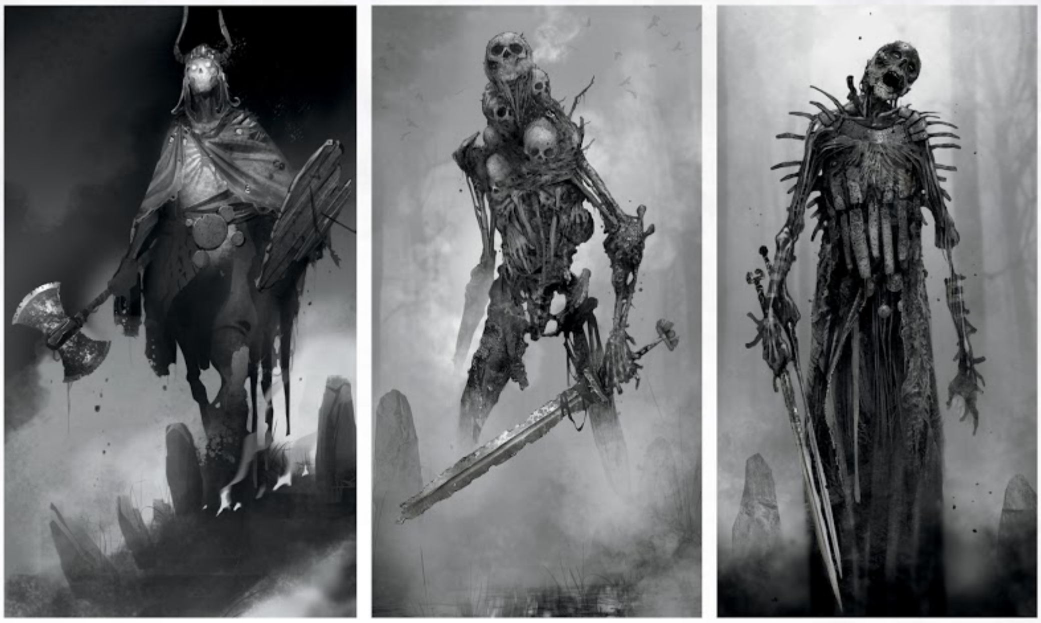
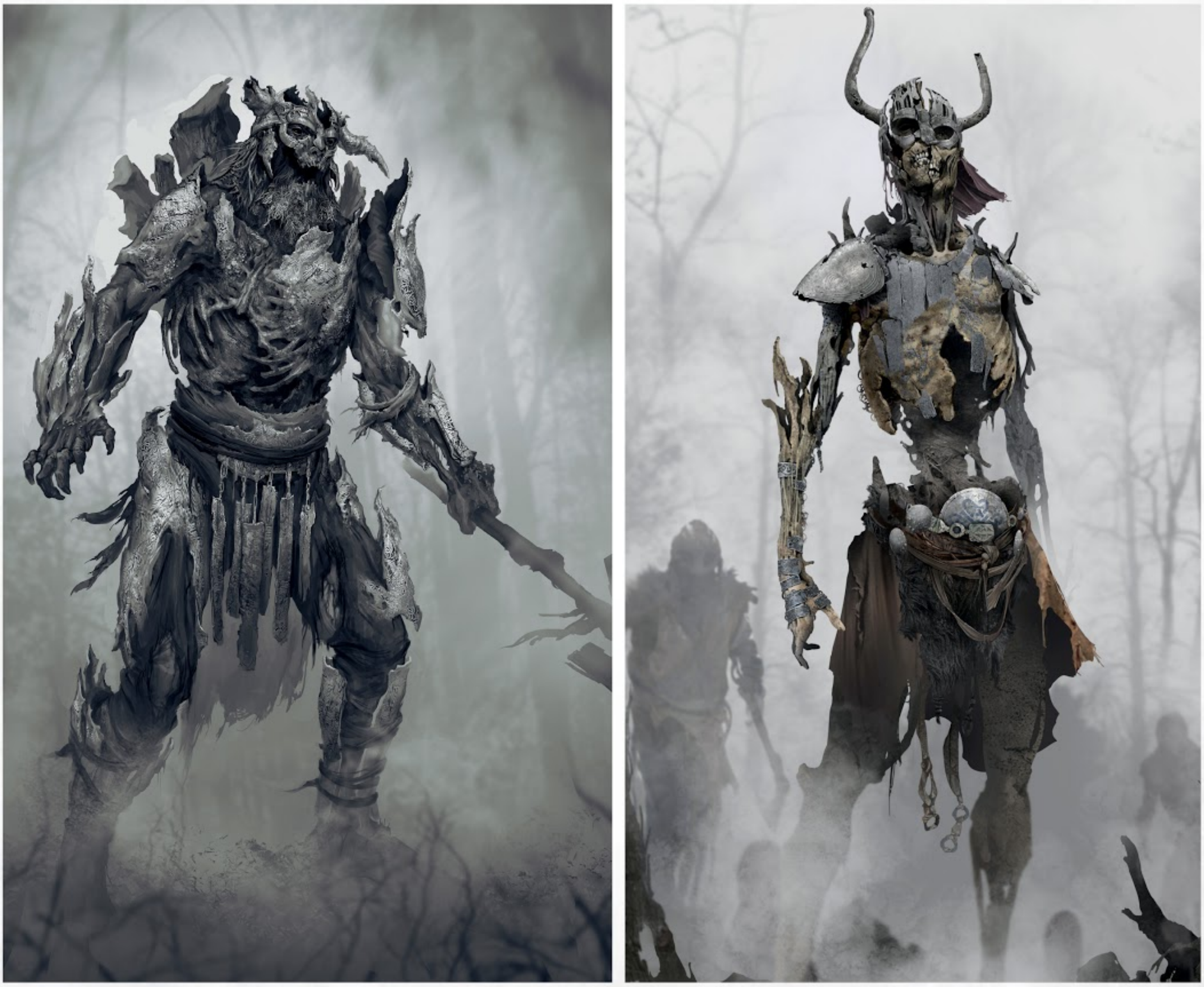
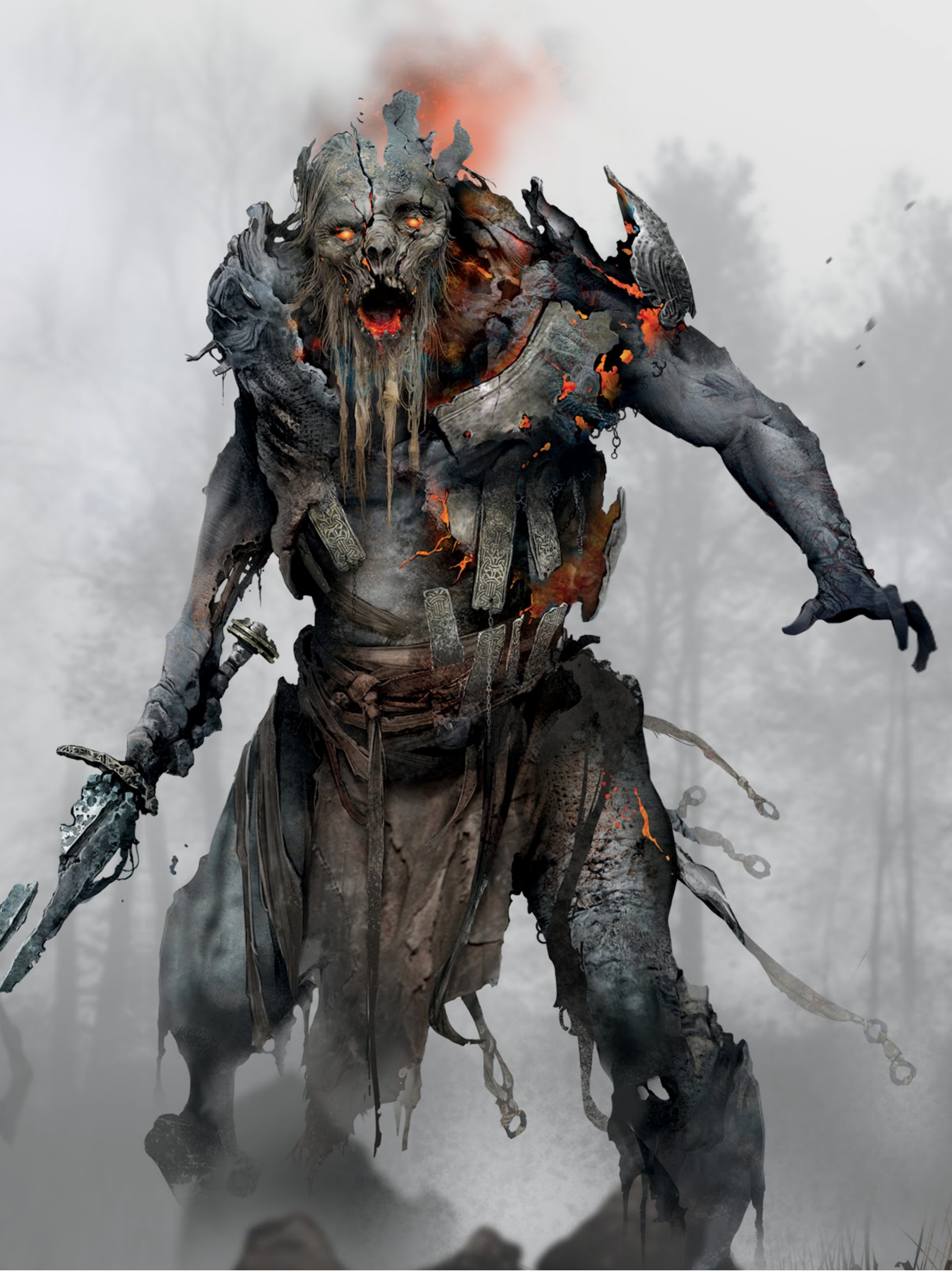
"Early on, we wanted a ferocious enemy for our heroes to encounter on their journey, so we explored multiple types of undead creatures," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish. "We wanted to avoid the standard zombie characters, and looking to Norse mythology, the Draugr was a creature that really stood out and provided us a great deal of inspiration."



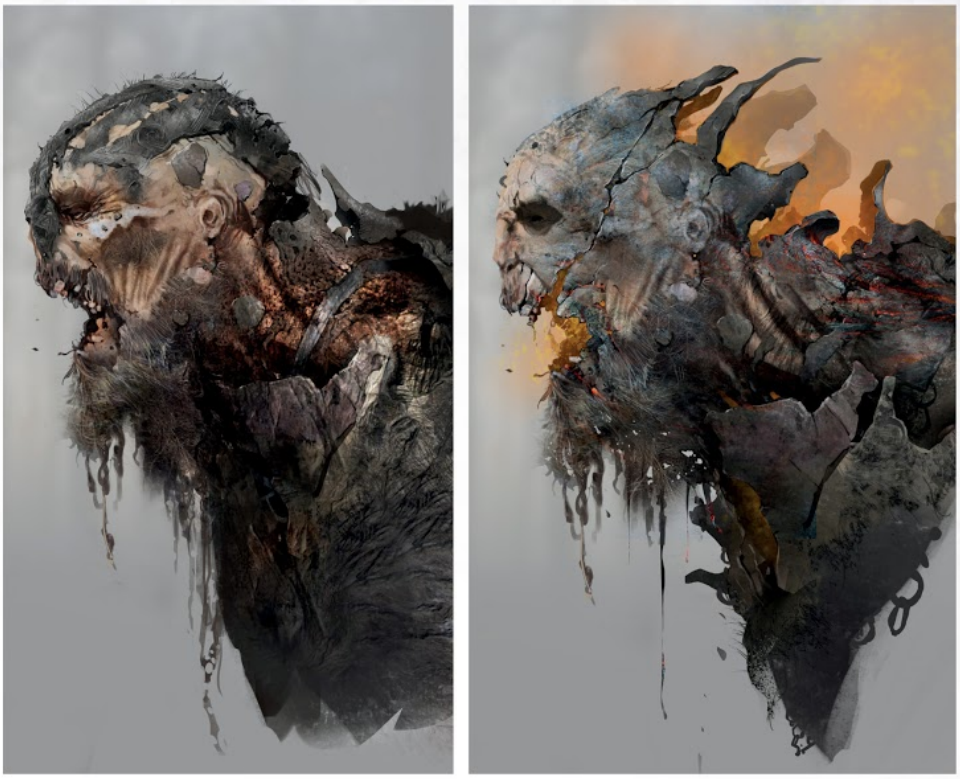


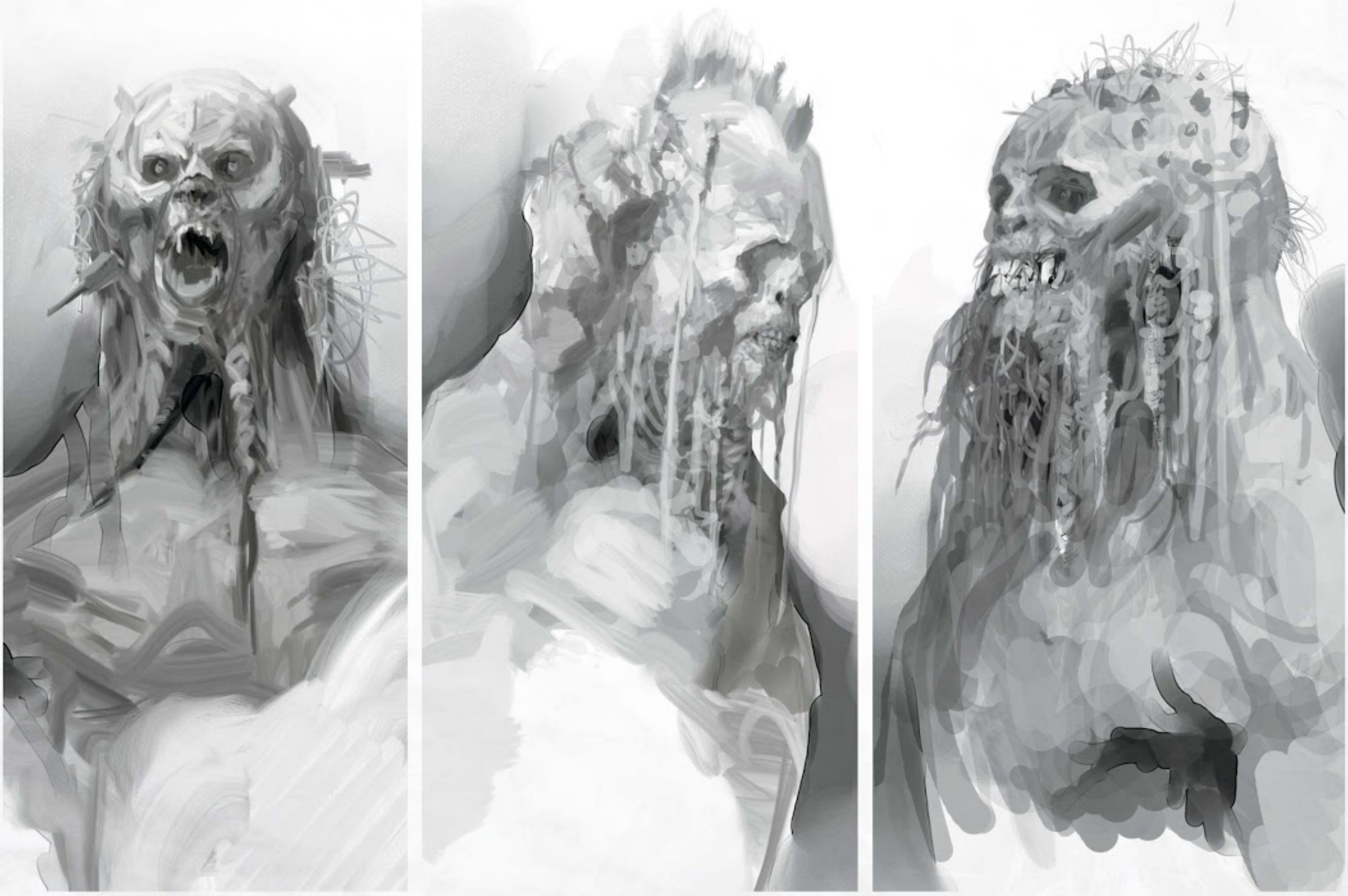
Resurrected warriors. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (bottom left); Dela Longfish (top, bottom right, opposite)



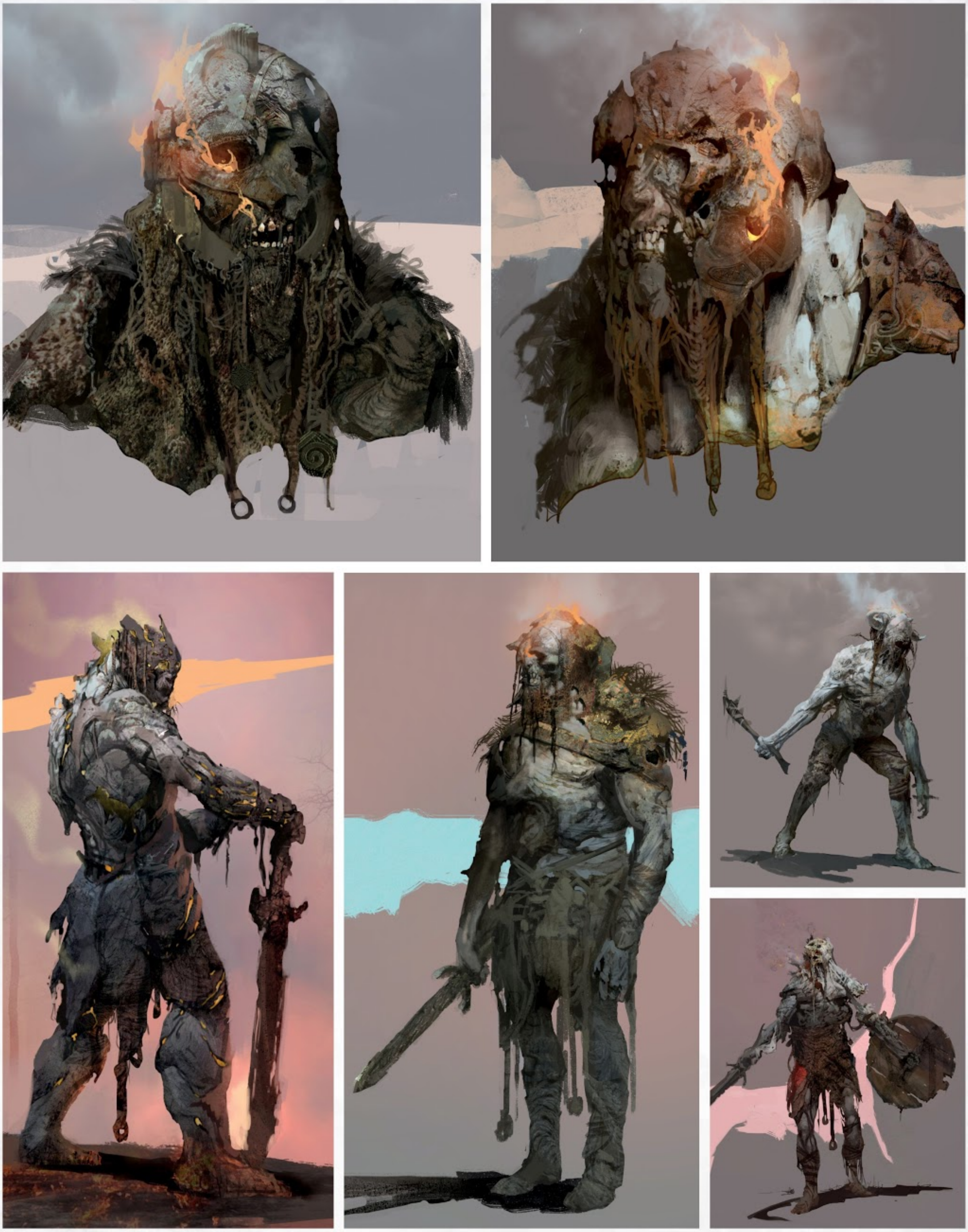
As per their lore, the Draugr are restless spirits who, unwilling to die, return to their fallen bodies and reanimate them. Their unnatural, continued rebirth has caused a fracturing of what remains of their physical forms. Here we see some explorations of how the team wanted to visually represent these ideas in their design.

Since a Draugr is no longer a living being, the powerful will of its tortured soul is the only force holding it together and animating its physical form. The team discussed how recognizable these creatures should even be as having once been human after enduring an unknowable period of severe physical decay. Each concept artist took their own pass at this character, and that collaboration helped to arrive at the Draugrs' grisly final form.





Further development exploring the look of the Draugr. Artists: Dela Longfish, Vance Kovacs



Artist: Vance Kovacs

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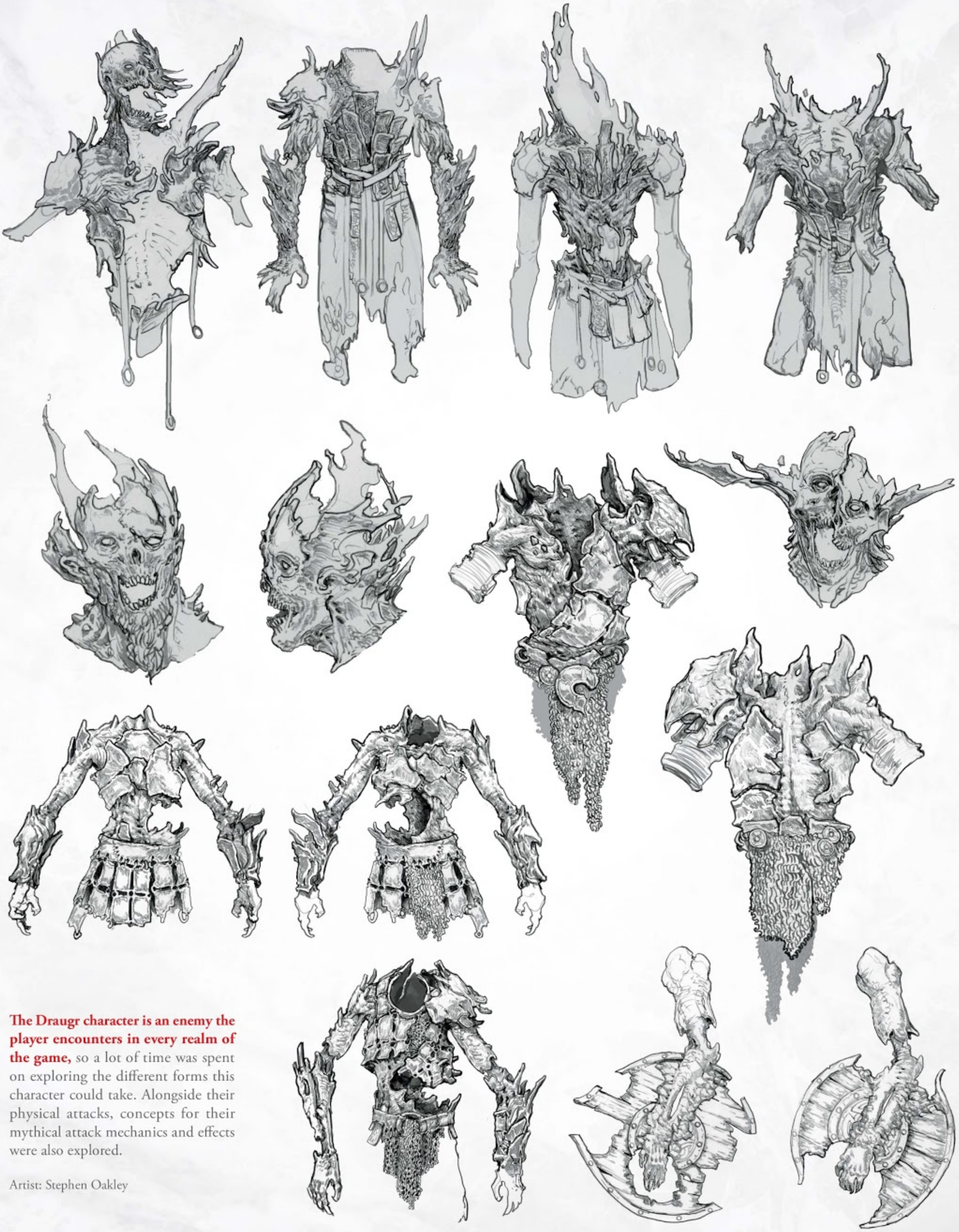

The Draugr character is an enemy the player encounters in every realm of the game, so a lot of time was spent on exploring the different forms this character could take. Alongside their physical attacks, concepts for their mythical attack mechanics and effects were also explored.

Artist: Stephen Oakley

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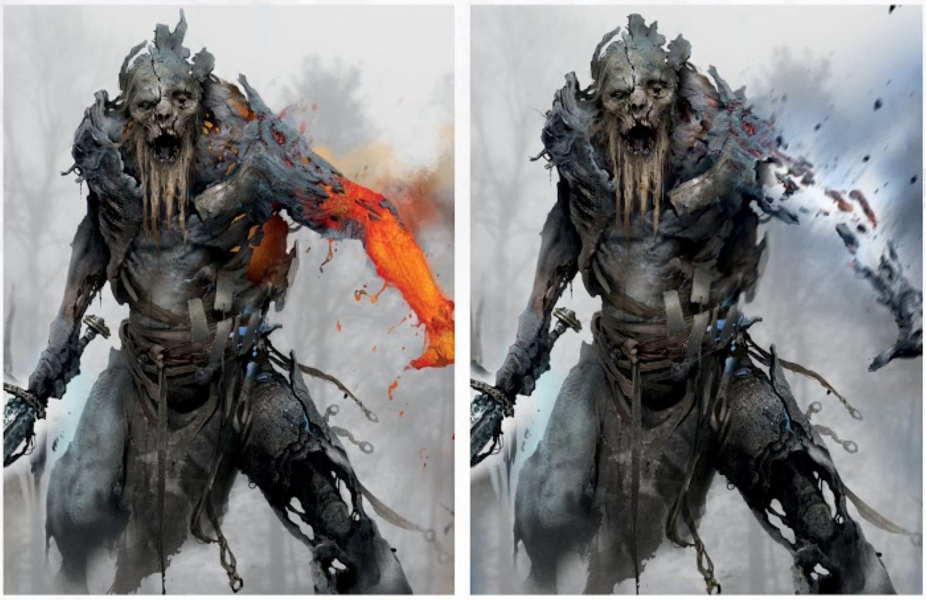
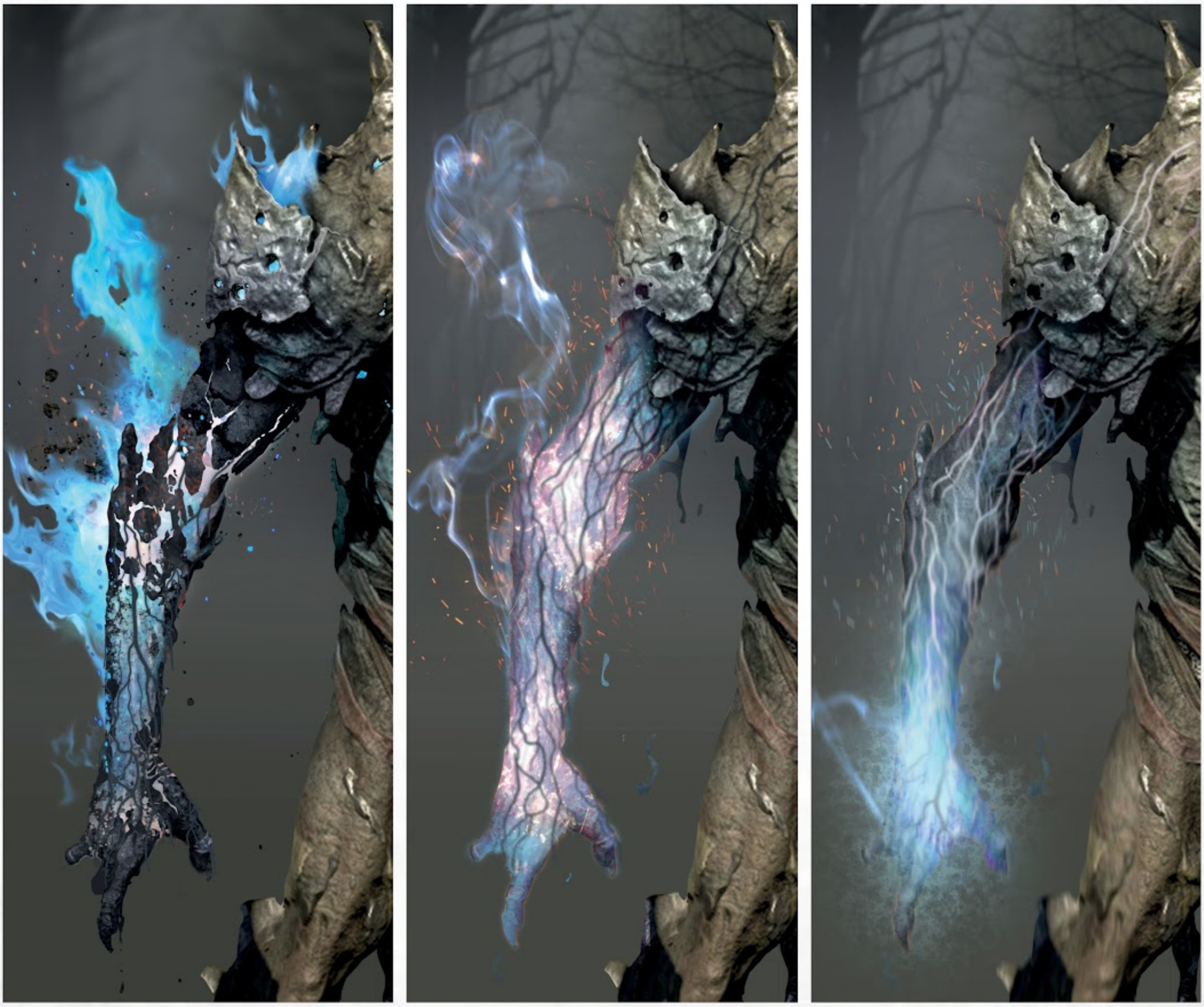
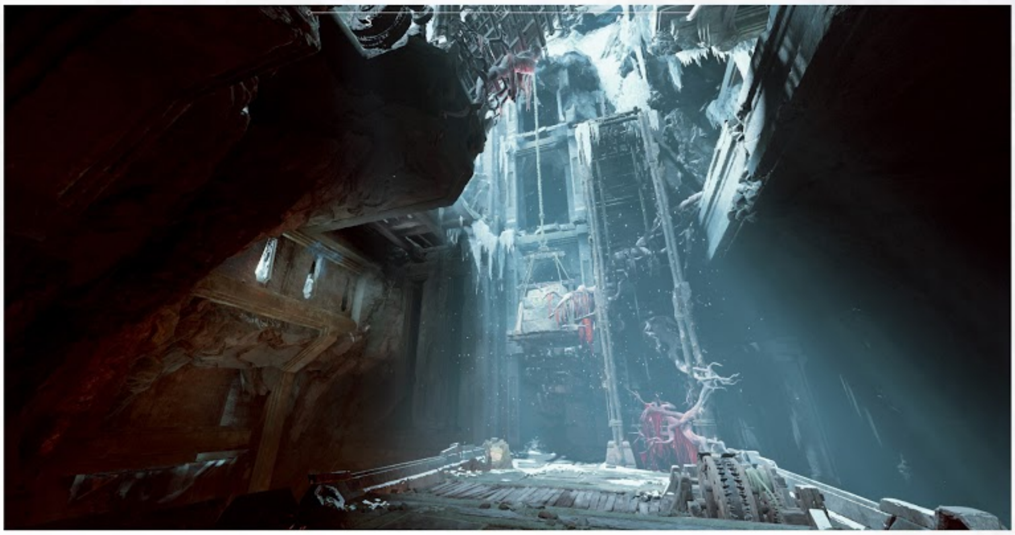


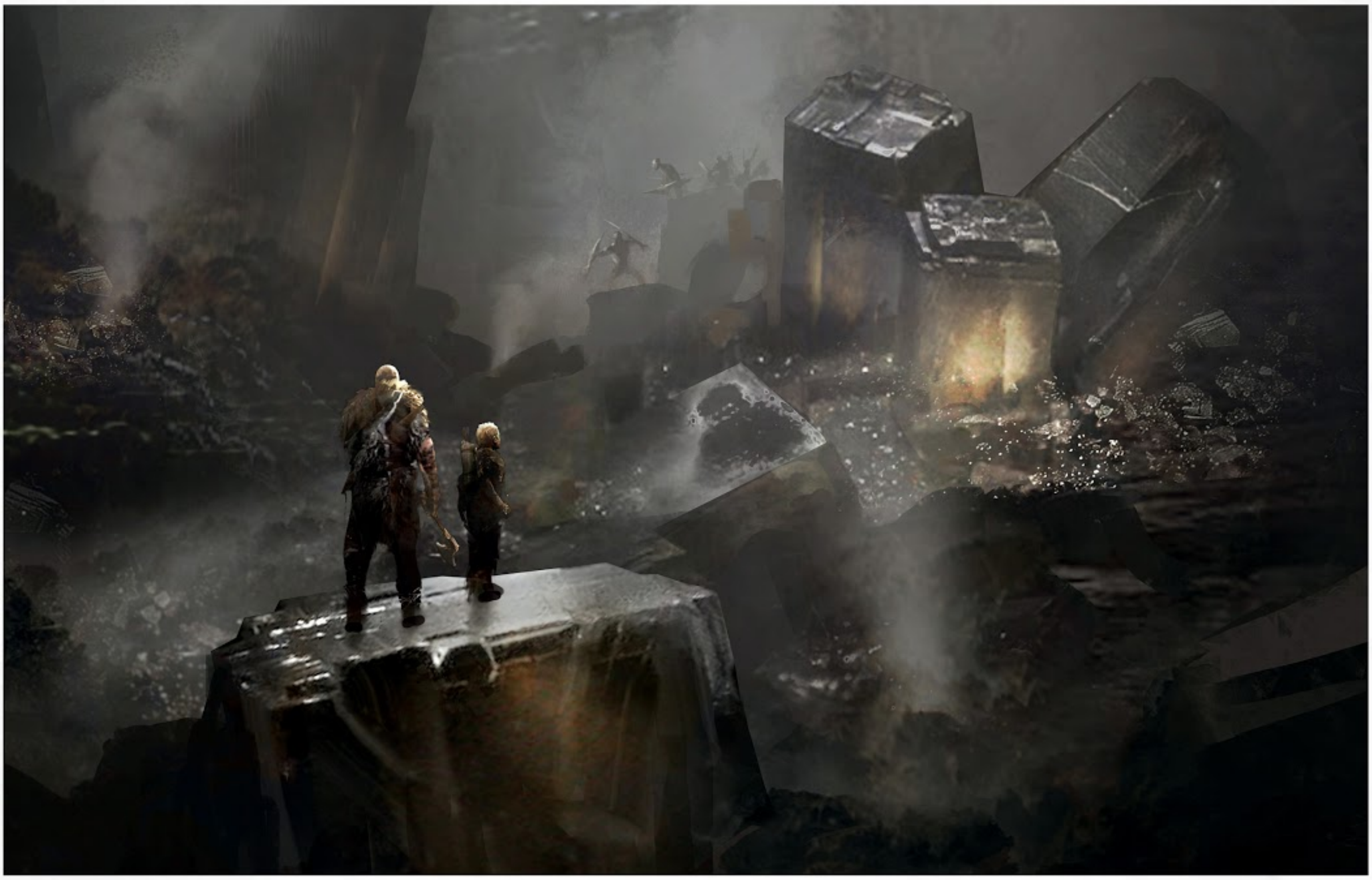
It was imagined the Draugrs' violent "rebirth" not only caused their bodies to break and fracture, but that the resulting reaction would cause hot magma or energy to be released from within, creating an additional supernatural effect to these characters. It's a constant goal to create a design that adds visual drama to a character that simultaneously makes game play more dynamic.

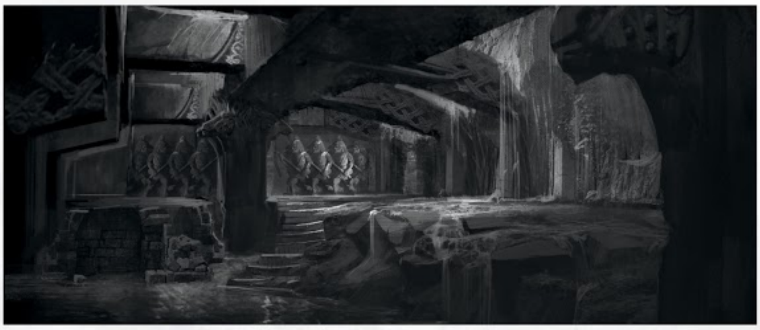


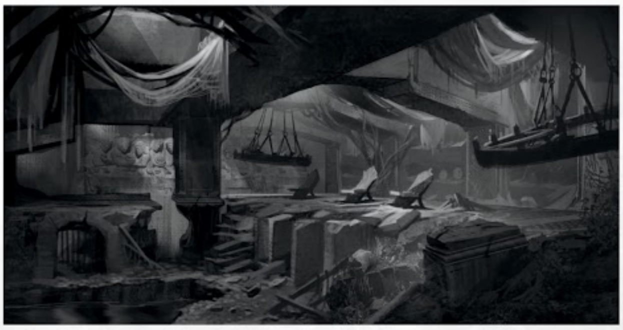
Adding a mythical element to the Draugr. Artist: Dela Longfish

“These concepts were used for early inspiration of various side content quest areas,” said John Palamarchuk. “We eventually used the crystal themes in the Huldra mines quests to tie the mining and materials back to the Huldra brothers. The top image became the architectural base shell for the Odin’s Vault challenge arenas that feature the optional Valkyrie bosses in the game.”

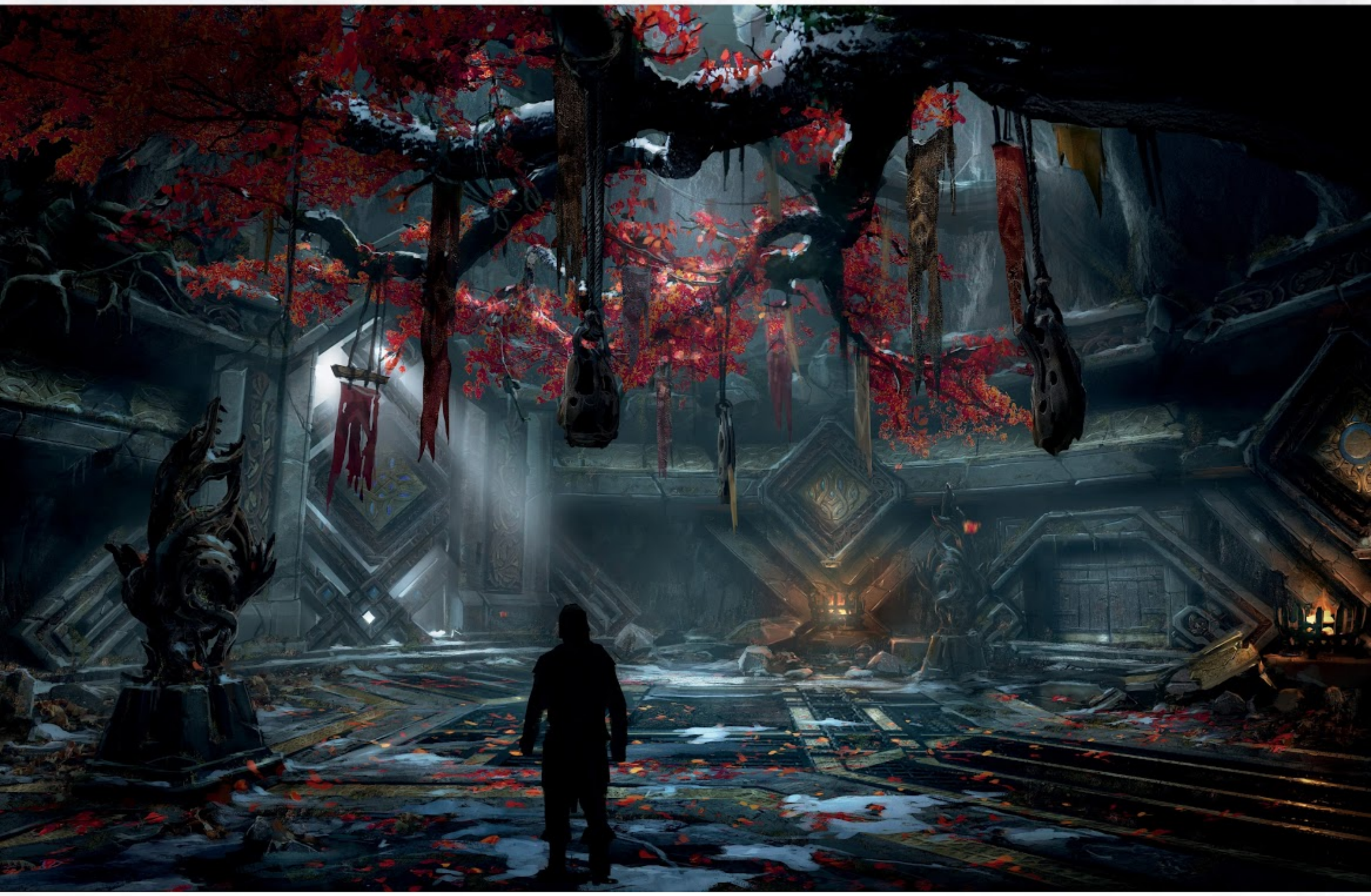


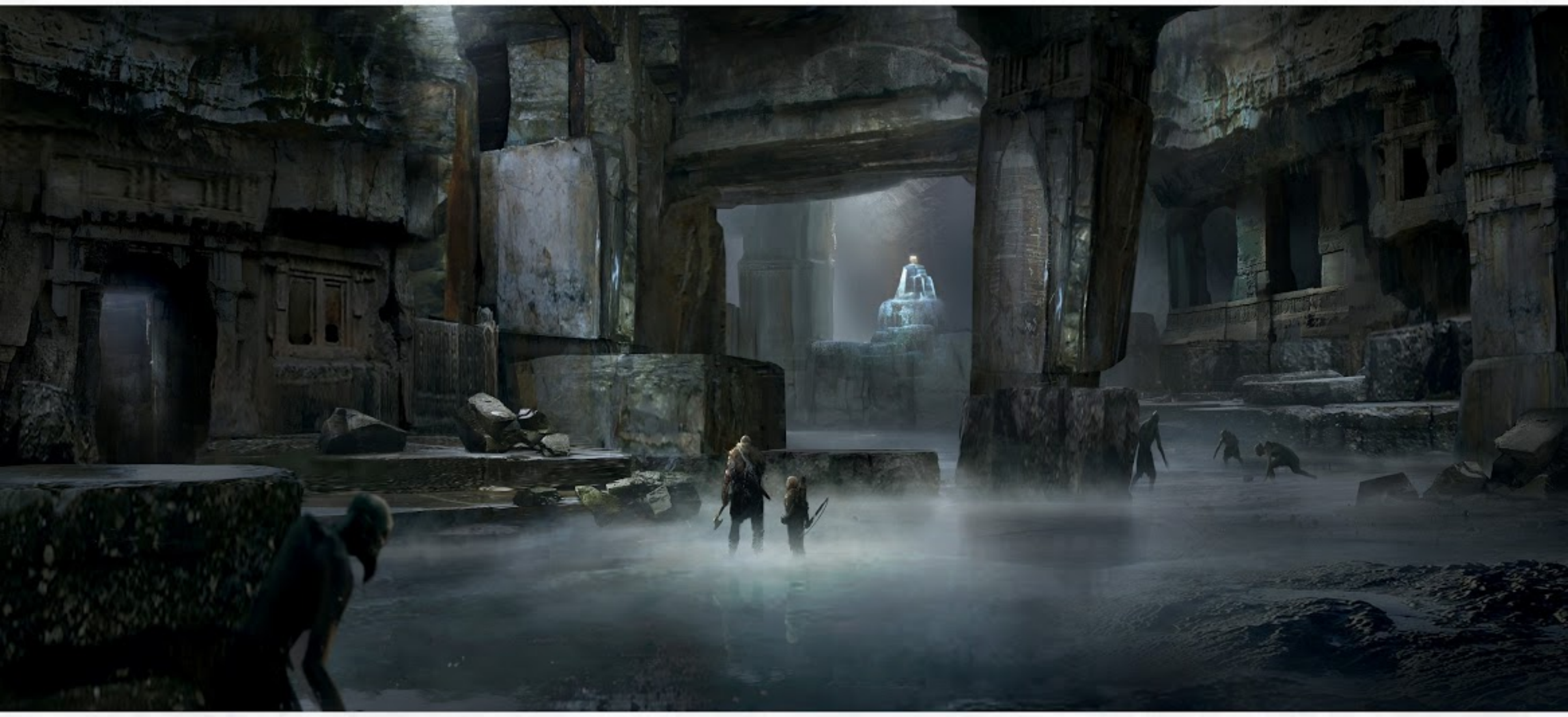






Depths of Midgard. Artists: Paul Coda, Melissa Smith, Raul Aparicio (top); Cliff Childs, Section Studios (bottom)





Artists: MOOD, Cliff Childs

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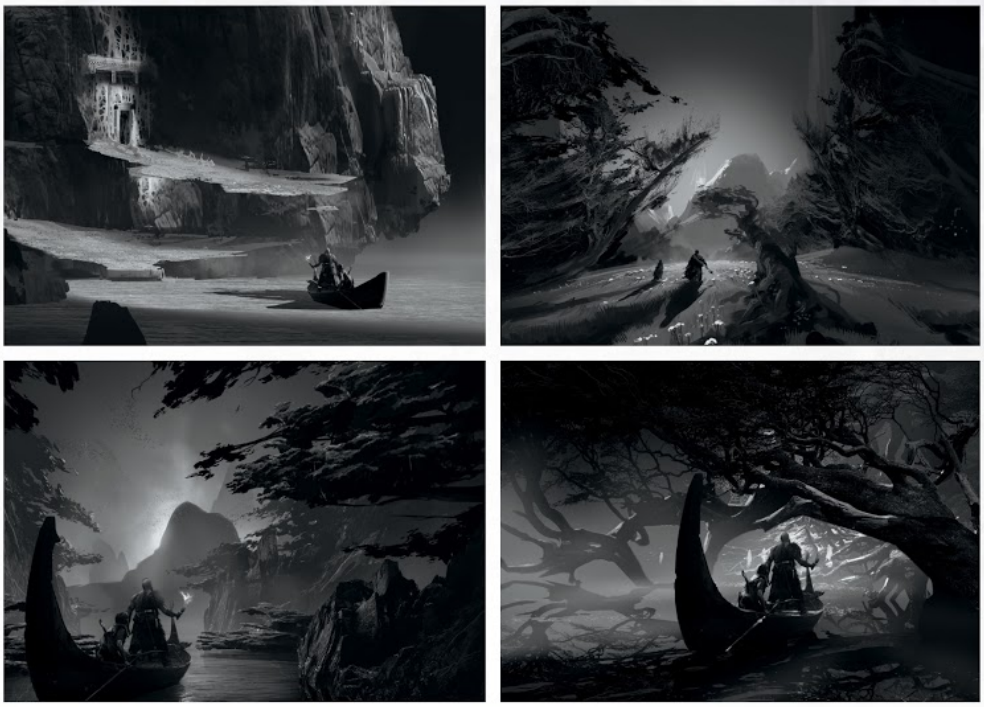
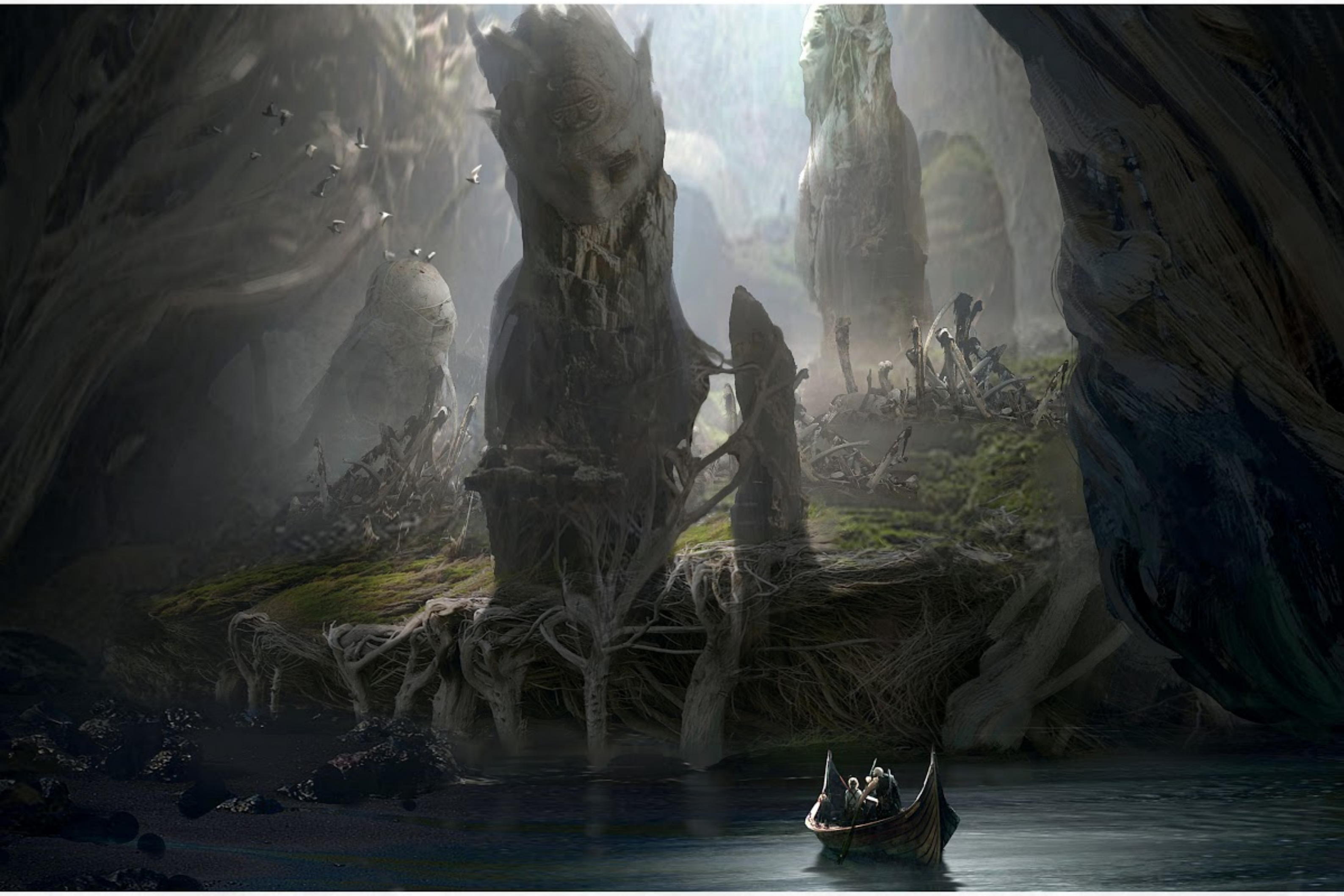
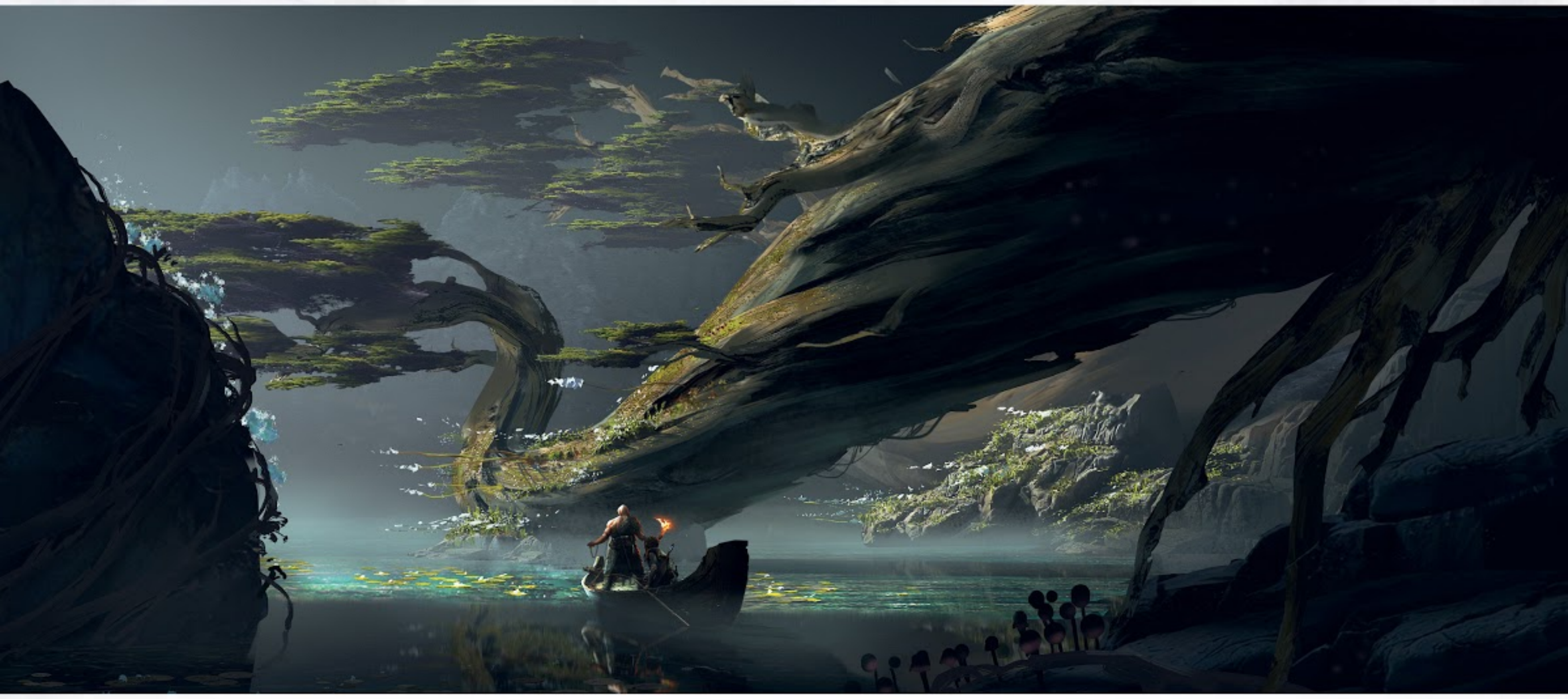
Once the *God of War* team finished work on the first playable and parts of Midgard had been established, the artists dove into exploring more of the world and attempted to find more of the mythology. The team also needed to find out what section of the game to crack into next, and Álfheim stood out as a prime target. Creative director Cory Barlog wanted the Light Elves to appear angelic and perfect, and their world needed to reflect that.

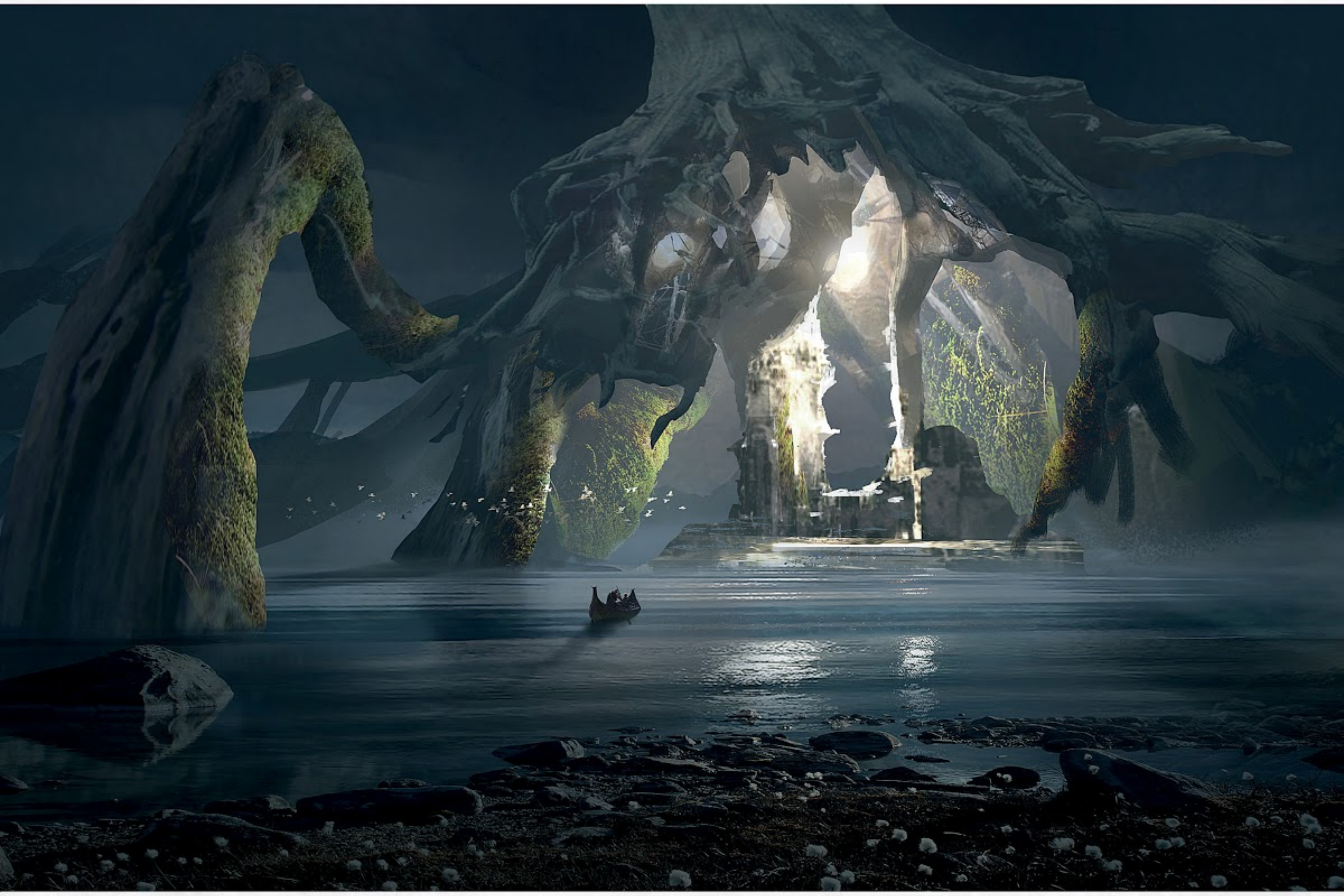
“I remember we sat in a room for like a month, off and on, talking about what the pillars of the art direction would be,” Luke Berliner recalled. “Finally what ended up kind of gelling—for the environment artists, leads, and character art leads, and really all of us—were three pillars: mythical realism, Norse mythology, and borrowing from the practical ’80s, pre-digital color film aesthetic.”





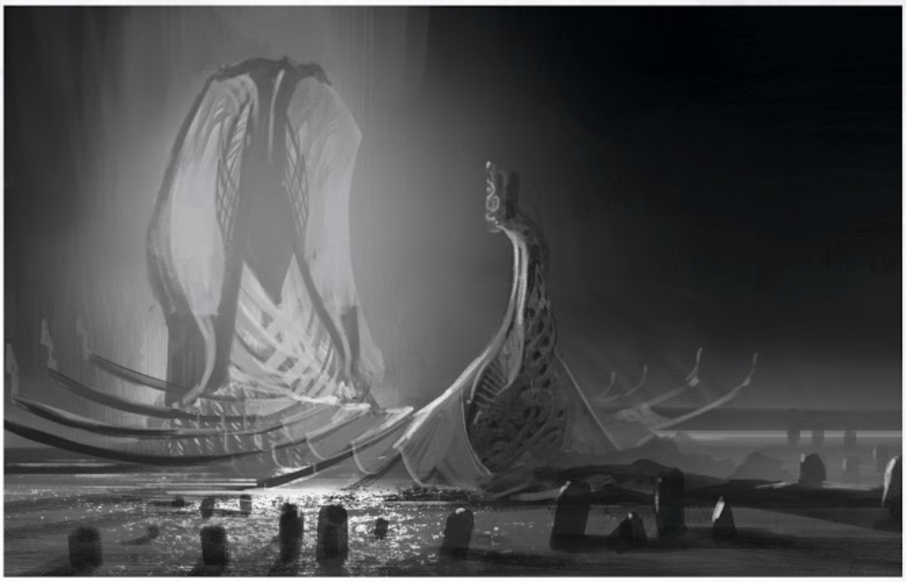
Reaching for the light in the land of the Light Elves. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Cliff Childs (bottom)

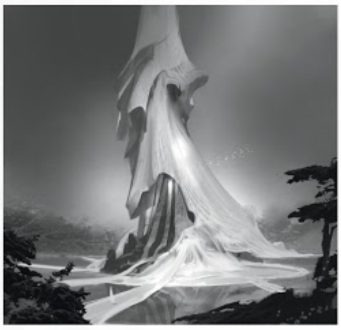


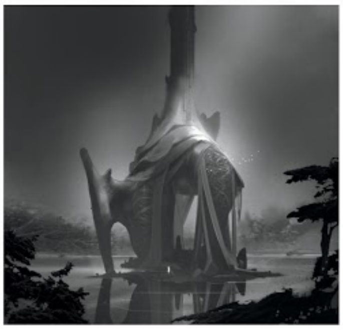


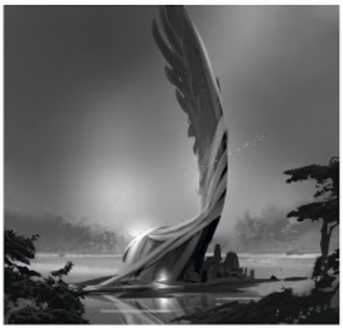
Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Cliff Childs (bottom)

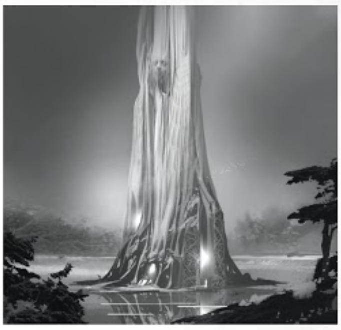
Here we see just a drop in the bucket of the various temple designs the team tried. "One idea we had around Álfheim was that the souls collected would be deposited at the base of the lake around the temple," said lead concept artist Luke Berliner. "These souls would be released through the temple to each realm as humans were born; when the temple was taken over by the Dark Elves, there would be more stillbirths happening, as the souls could not leave the lake."

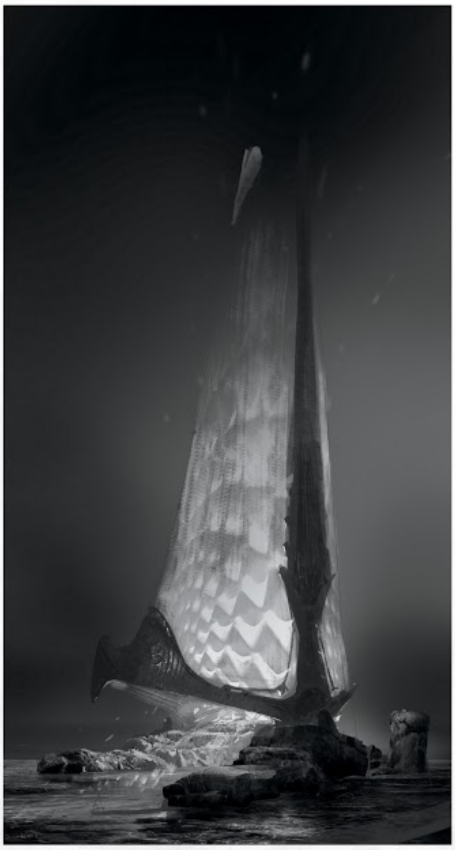


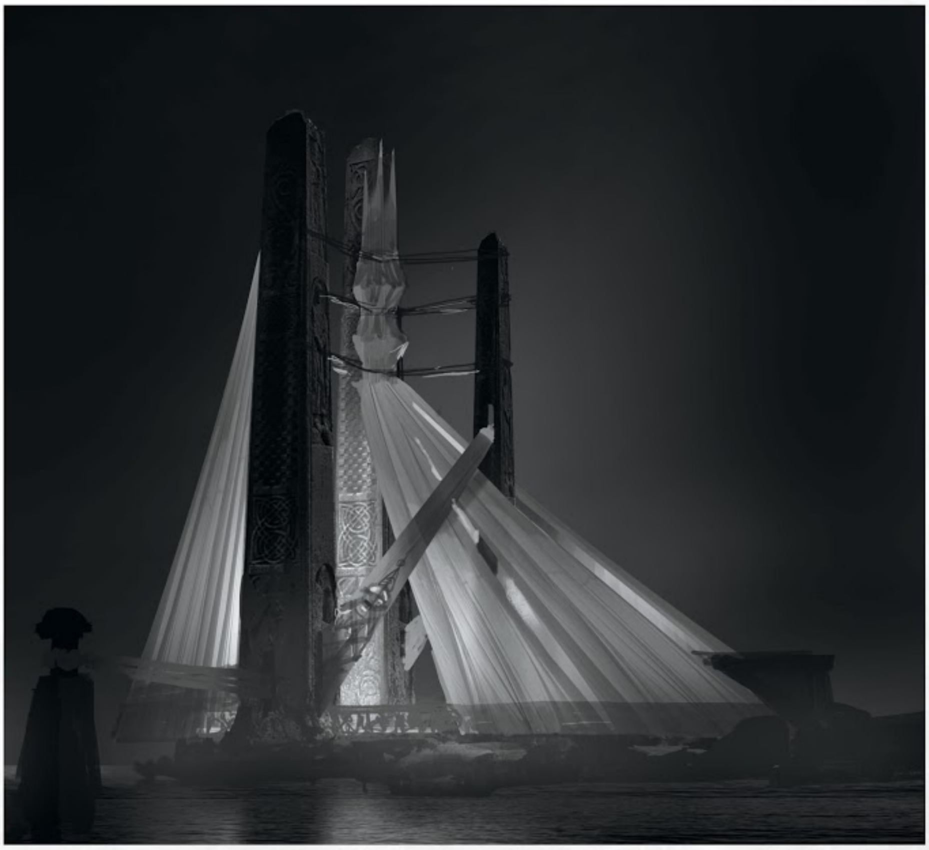












Studies of the temple of Álfheim. Artists: Section Studios, Luke Berliner

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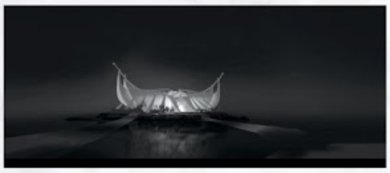
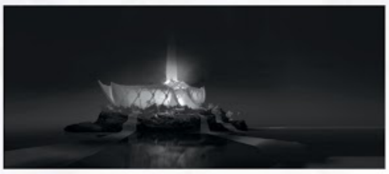
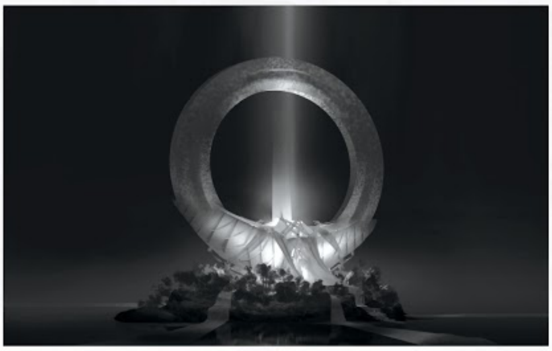
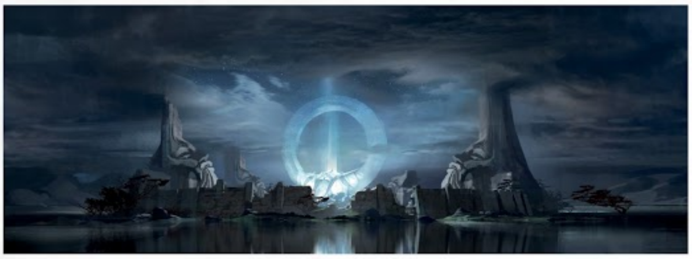
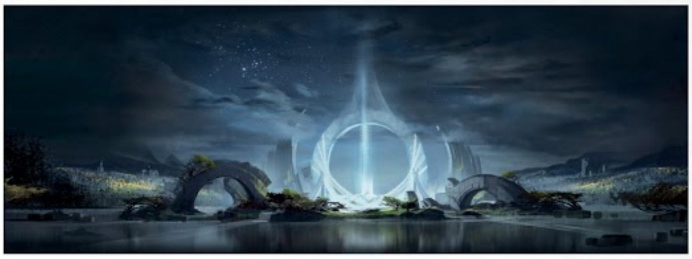
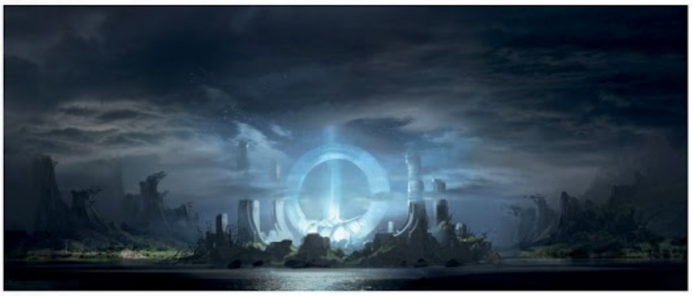
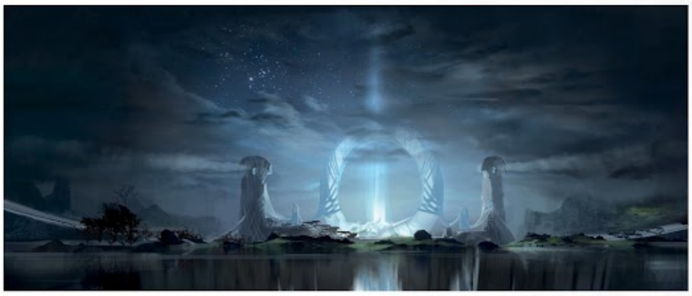
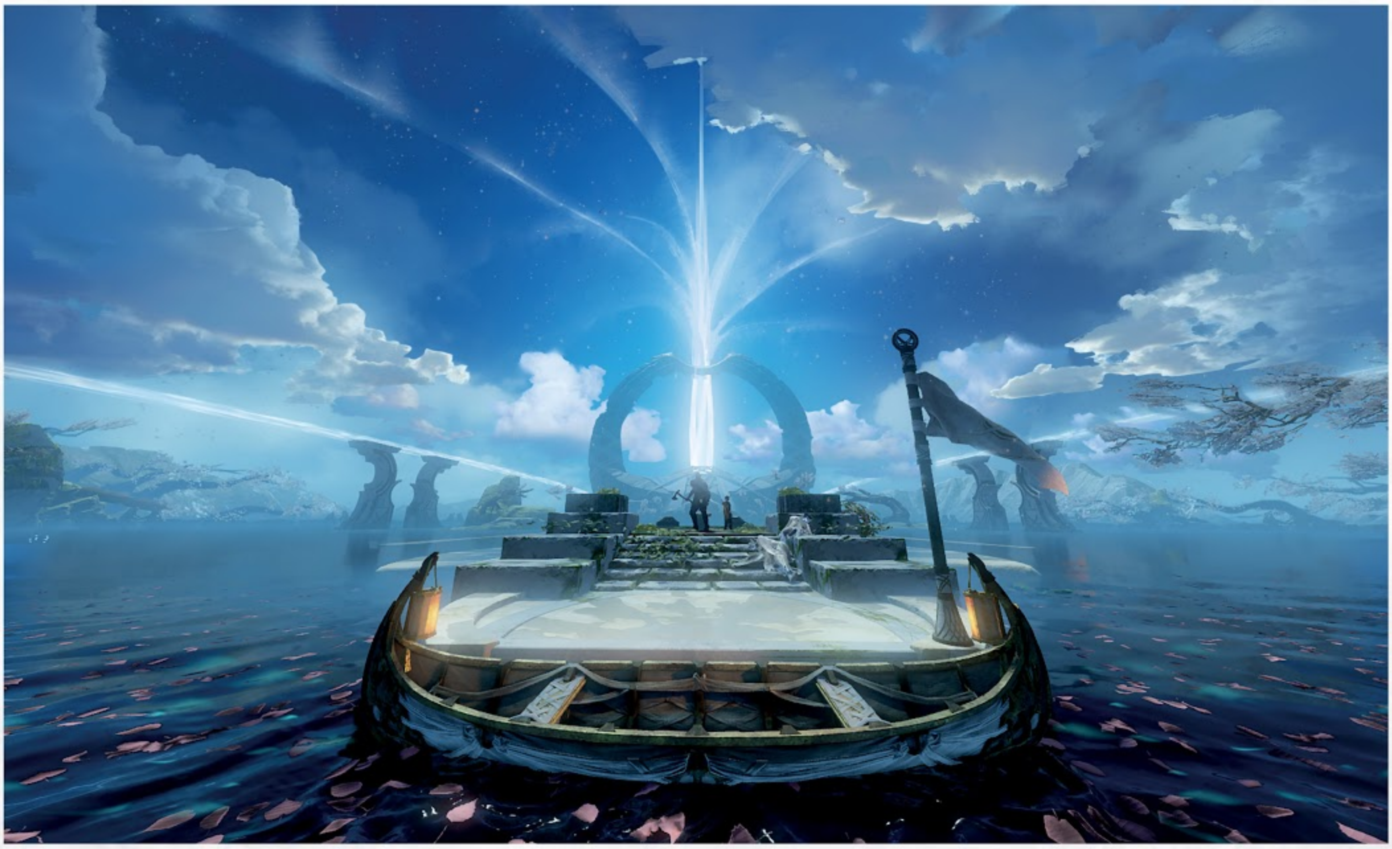
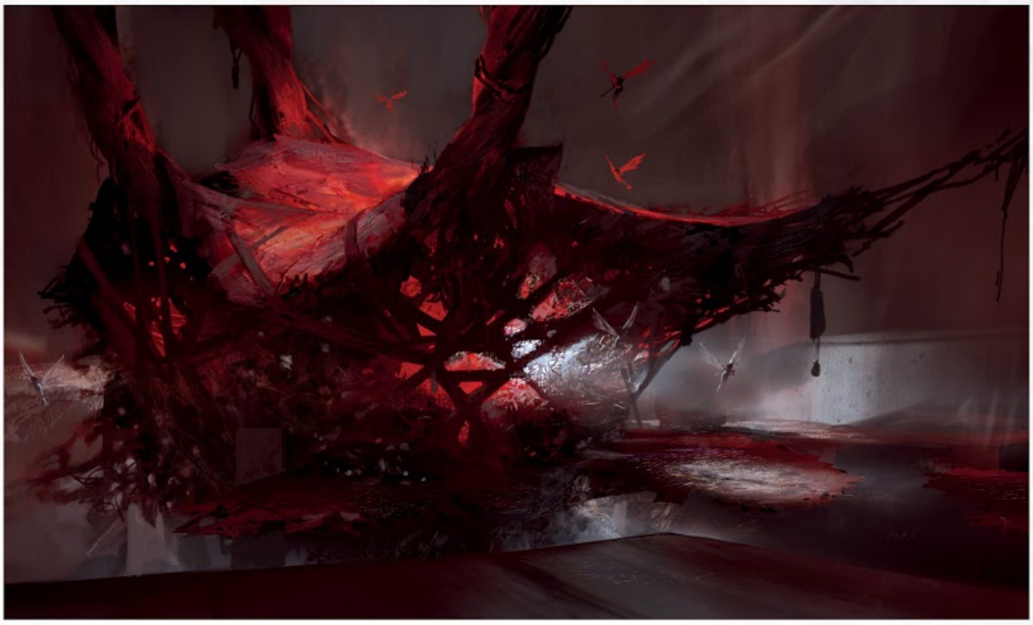




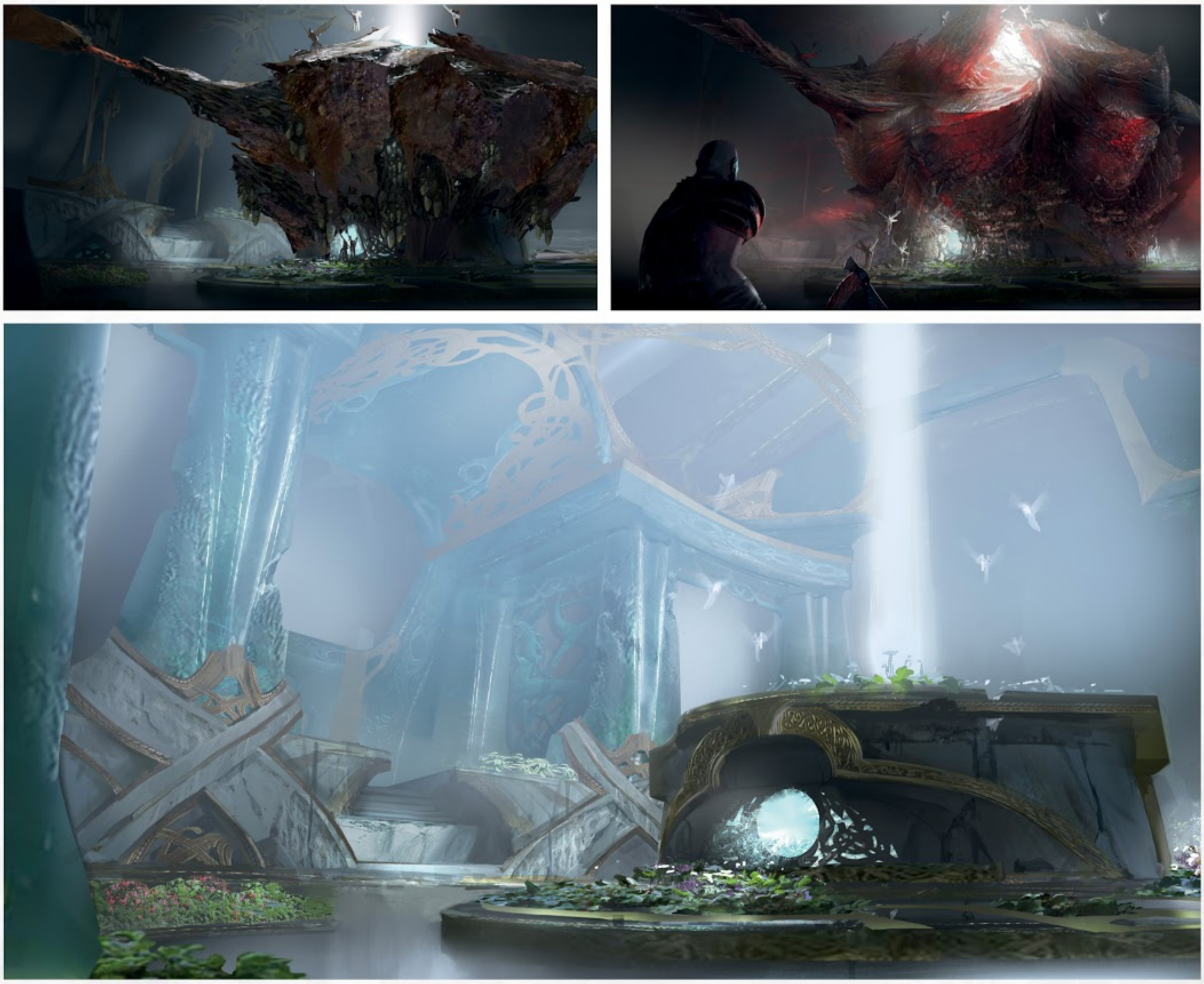
Experimenting with visual expressions of light and life, the team stumbled onto the theme of the circle. Creative director Cory Barlog wanted this temple to symbolize life and rebirth, and this shape—a simple concept with a more powerful and iconic look than anything they had tried before it—ended up resonating with him.

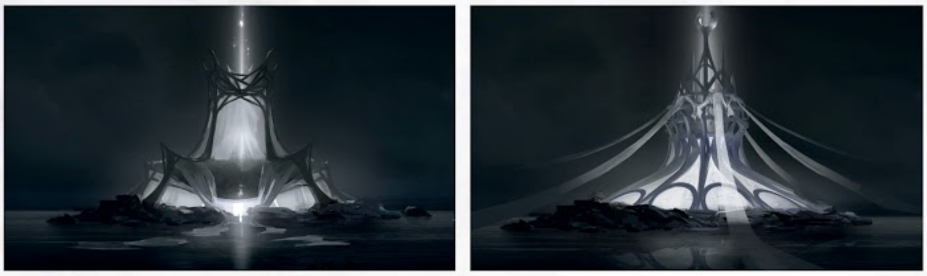
Artists: Luke Berliner (top, bottom); Section Studios (middle); Erik Jakobsen (bottom)

The interior of the Álfheim temple, where the Dusk Veil hangs invasively over the Light of Álfheim. "We talked about the Light of Álfheim as if it had always been there," said Berliner. "The temple around it was built by the Light Elves to celebrate it, and over the years the Dark Elves and Light Elves fought over this Light. The Dark Elves would feed off of it like a drug."

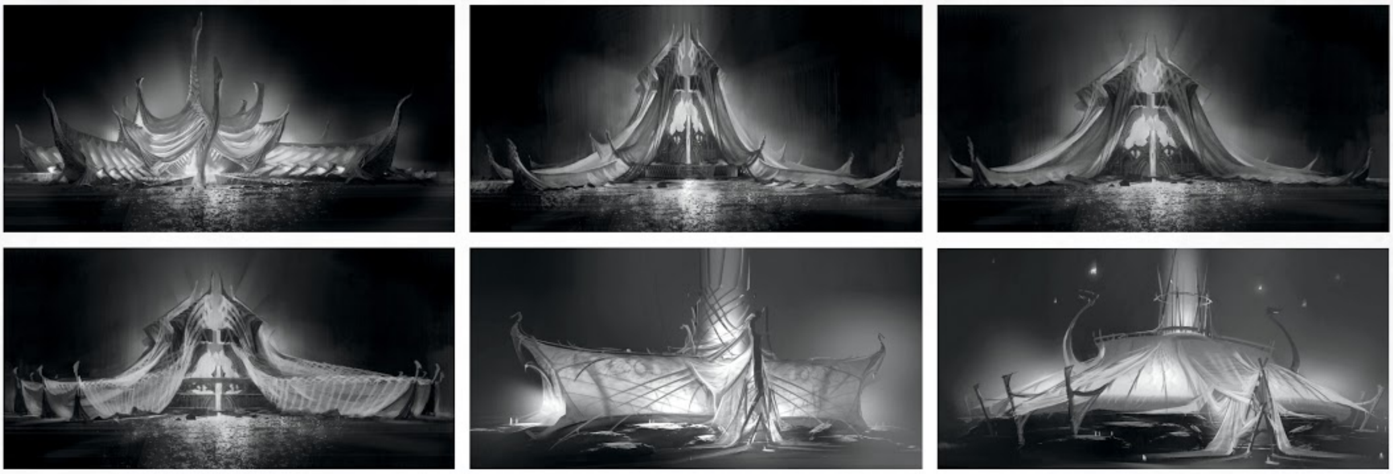


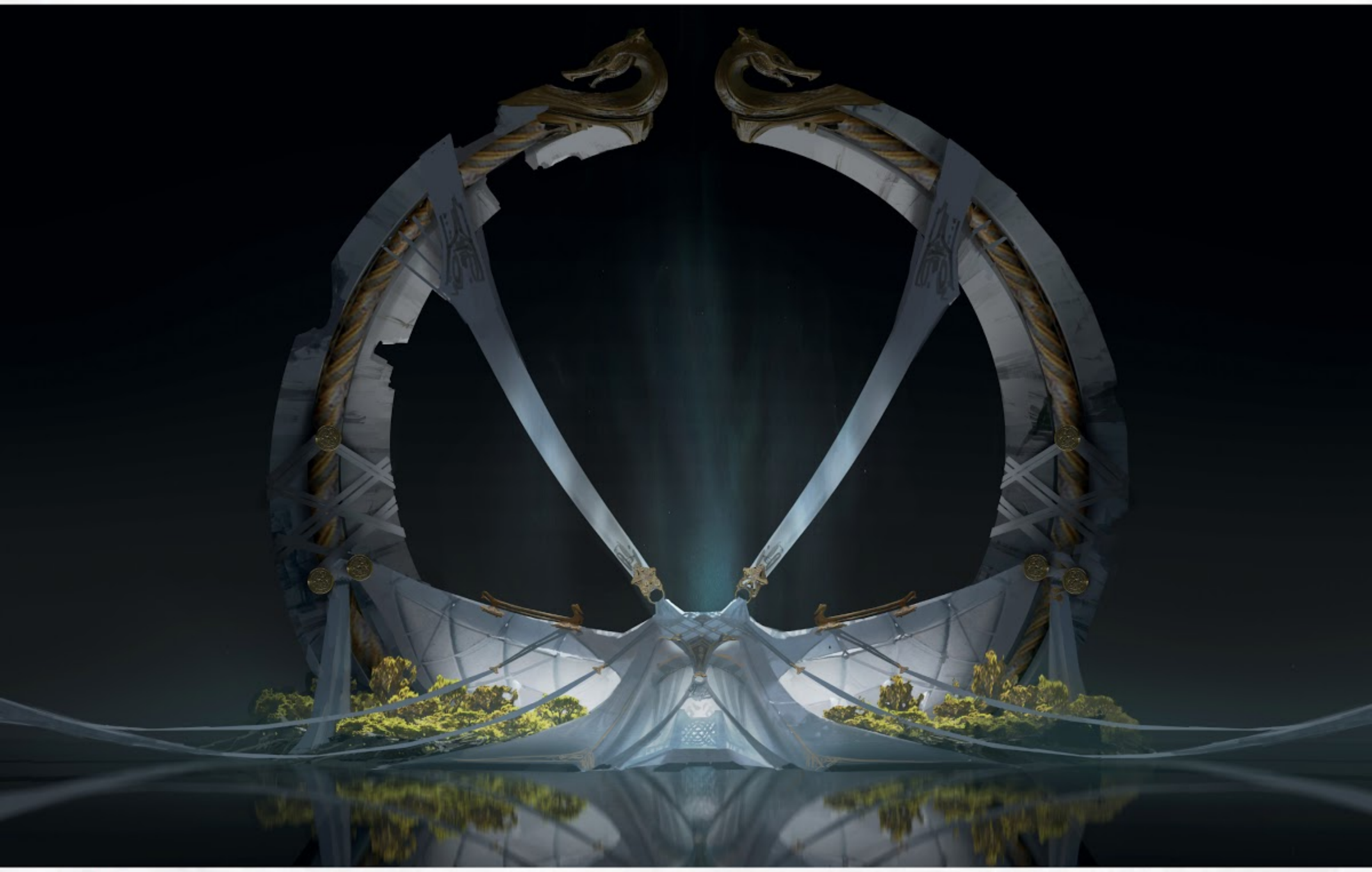


Entering the Dusk Veil. Artists: Section Studios (top); Luke Berliner (bottom)



Because so much of the world was made from hard materials like stone and wood, the team wanted to bring a softer angelic quality to the temple. Fabric became an early idea to which they became attached, since it can have an implied rigidity when stretched over a structure, but it can also be allowed to fall and soften on its own.

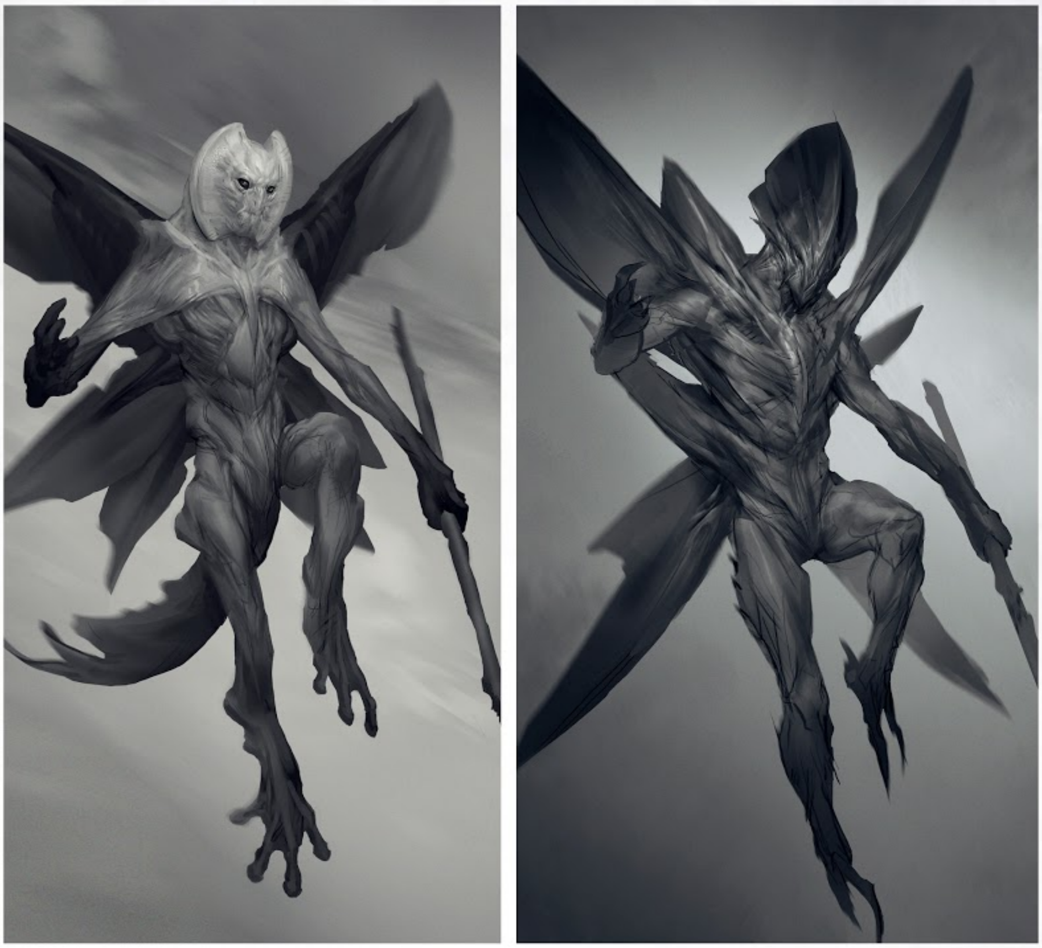


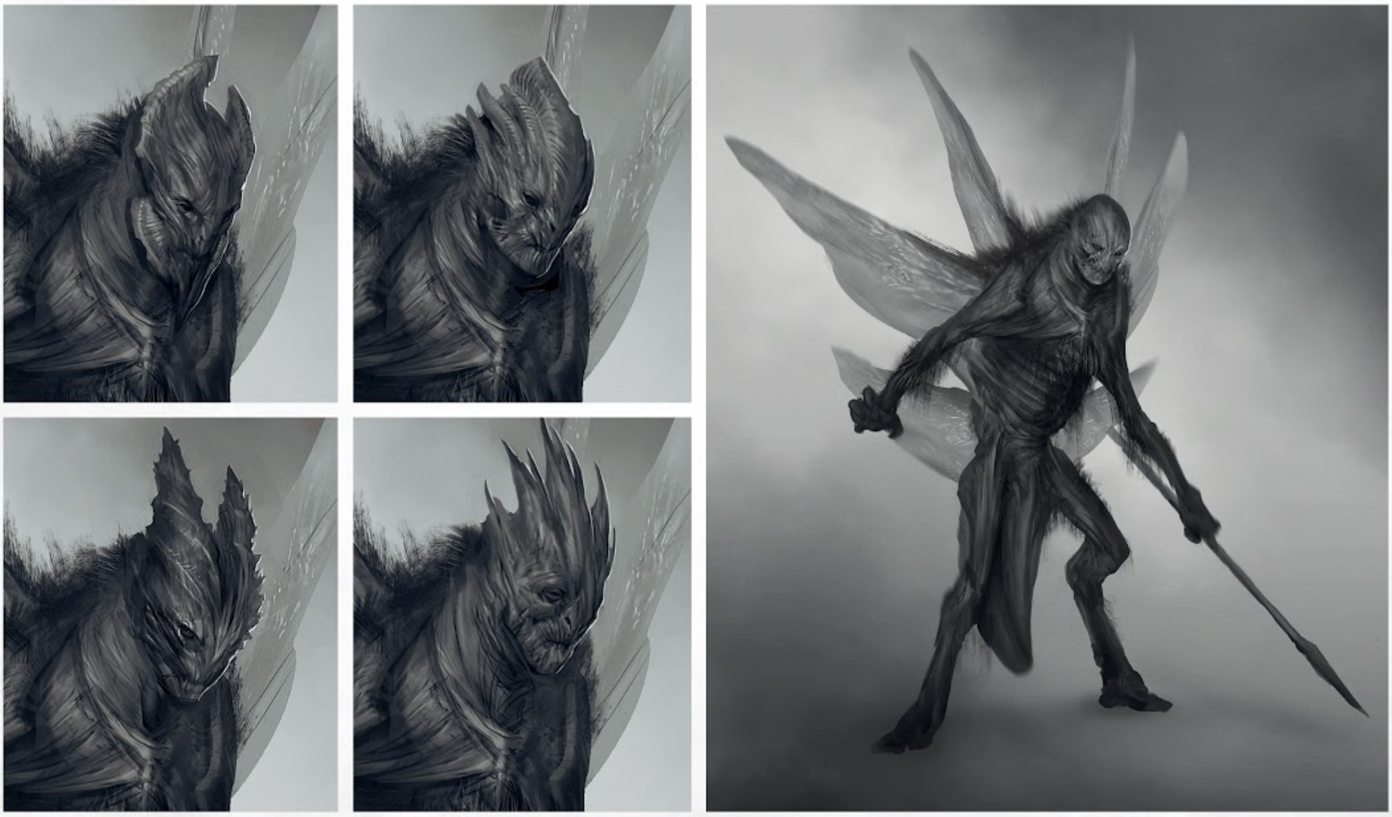


Álfheim's Temple of Light. Artists: Section Studios, Luke Berliner

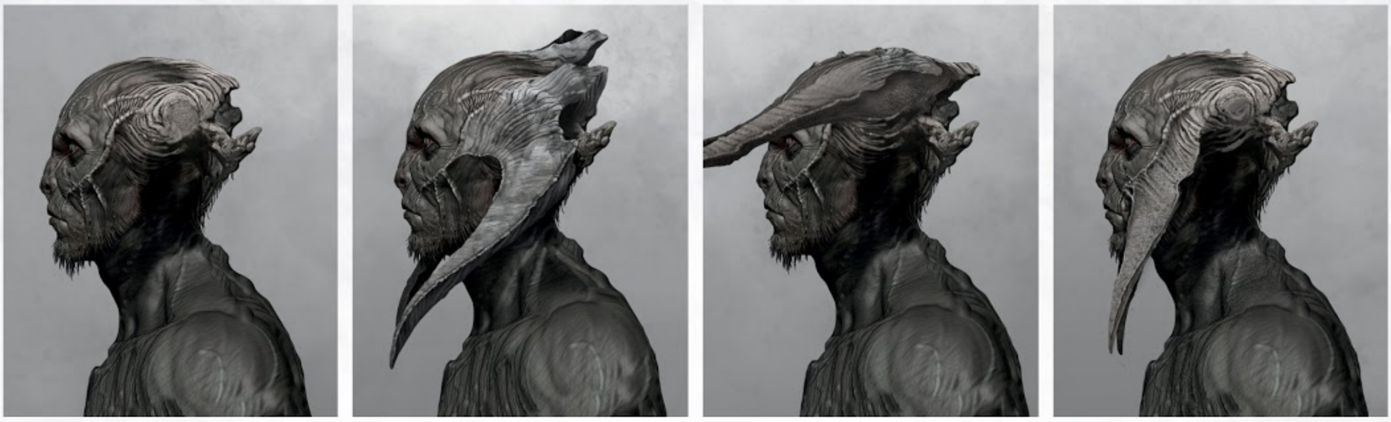
"The Dark Elves and Light Elves were such an interesting set of characters to design, and early in development we knew we wanted to see them in the game," said Dela Longfish.

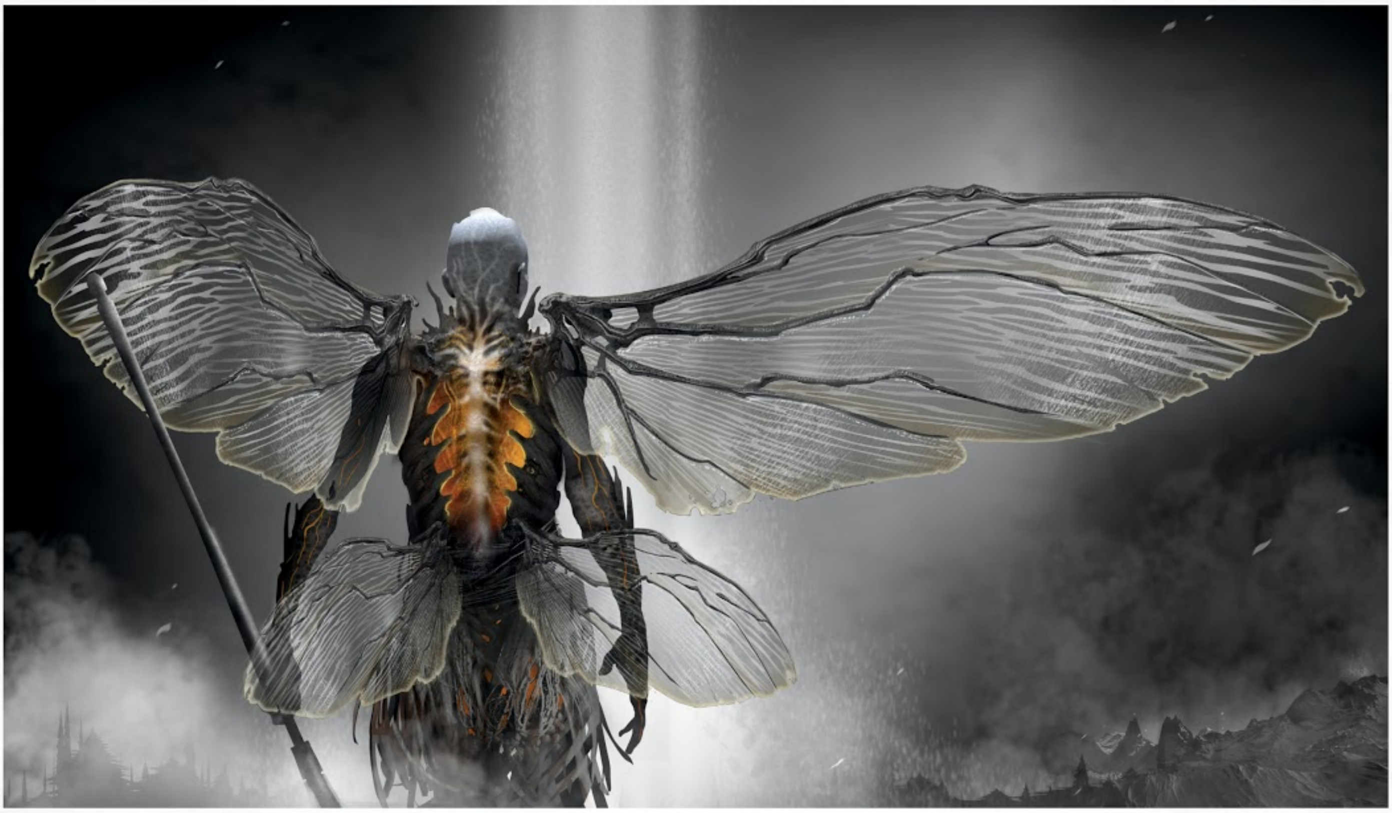
While they are a more elevated race than man, they are still less than gods, occupying a unique middle ground in Norse mythology. "We wanted something more than the classic elf design, and here we can see the first concepts of the Dark Elves."



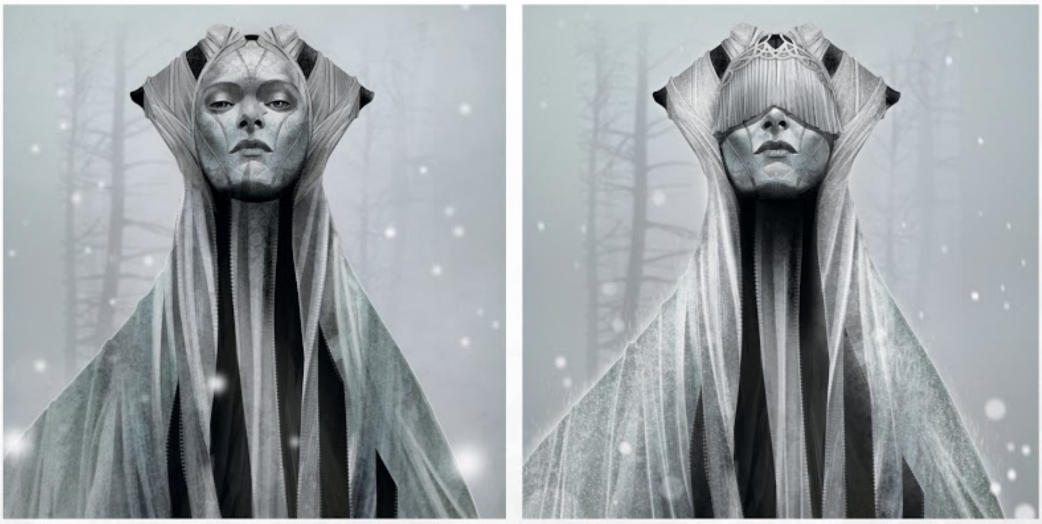


Early concept designs for the Dark Elves. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (this page); Dela Longfish (opposite)



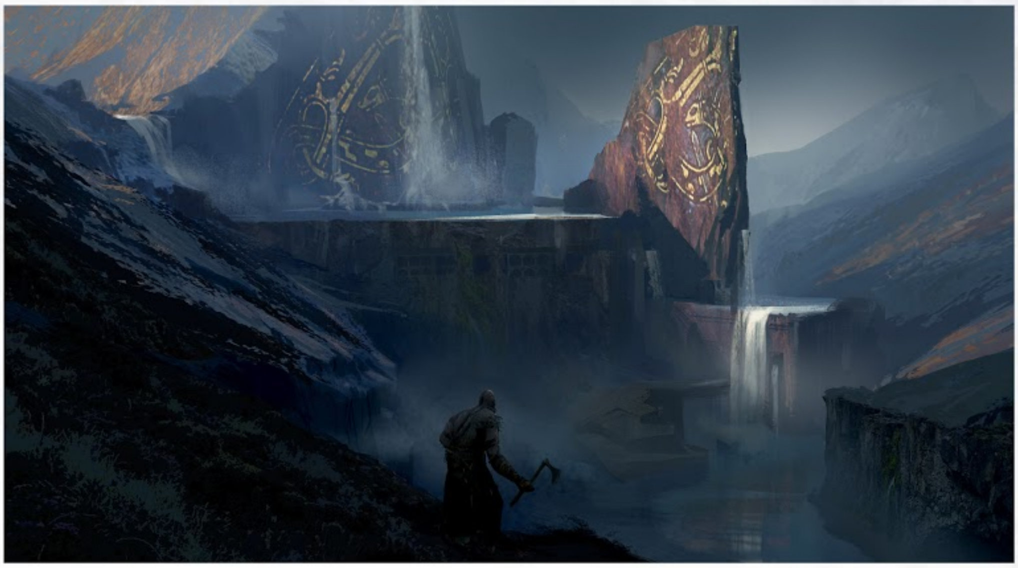


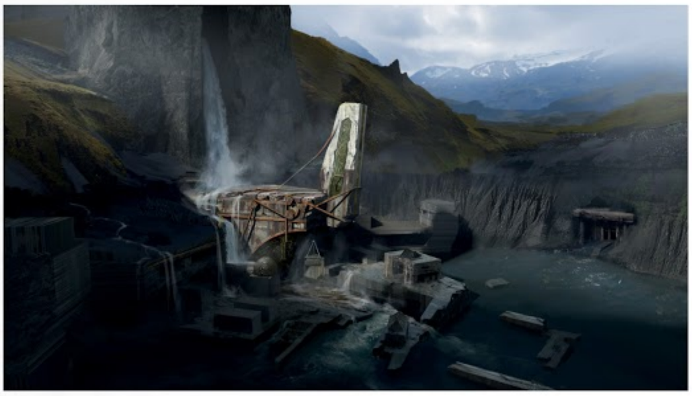
The Light Elves were designed to feel angelic and monk-like, and while at first glance their appearance is different than that of the Dark Elves, they have the same body markings, and their own horns are made to look like headpieces.

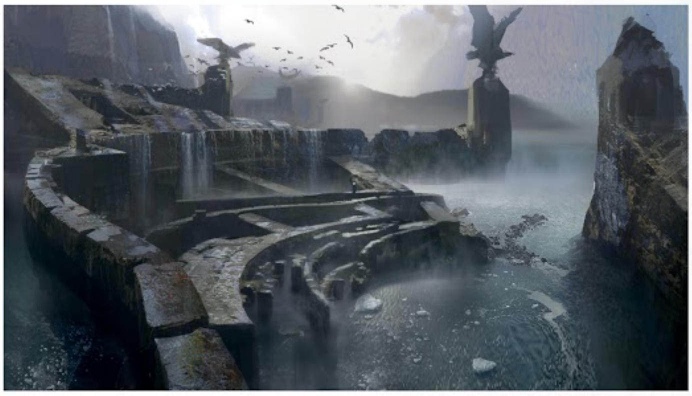


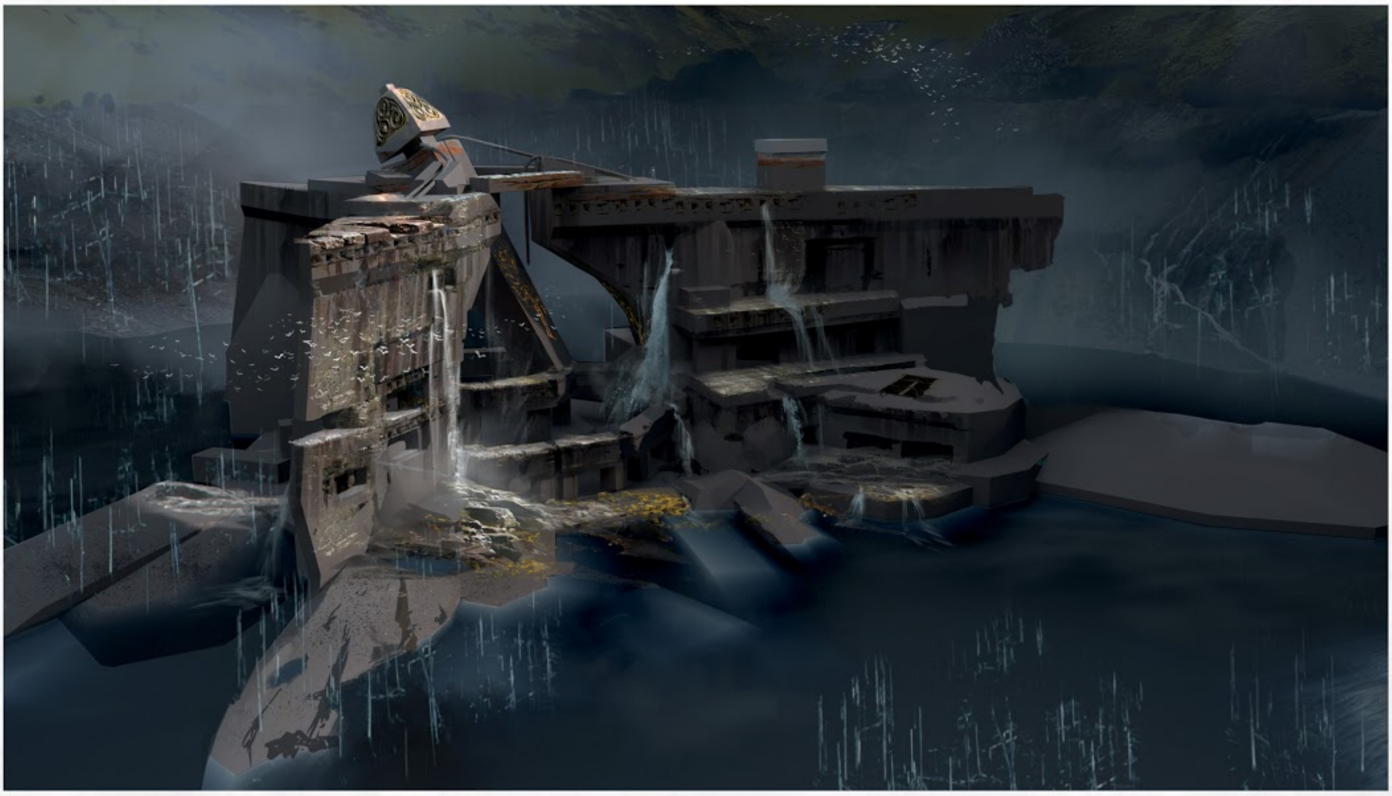
Light Elf concepts. Artist: Dela Longfish (this page, opposite)

Týr's Temple was an opportunity for the team to implement some of the grand architecture for which *God of War* is known, but these early sketches were far too decayed and humble for the majestic scale that Cory Barlog wanted to convey since Týr was intended to be portrayed as an ostentatious egomaniac. The team got very excited once they discovered the idea of the compass for the realms.

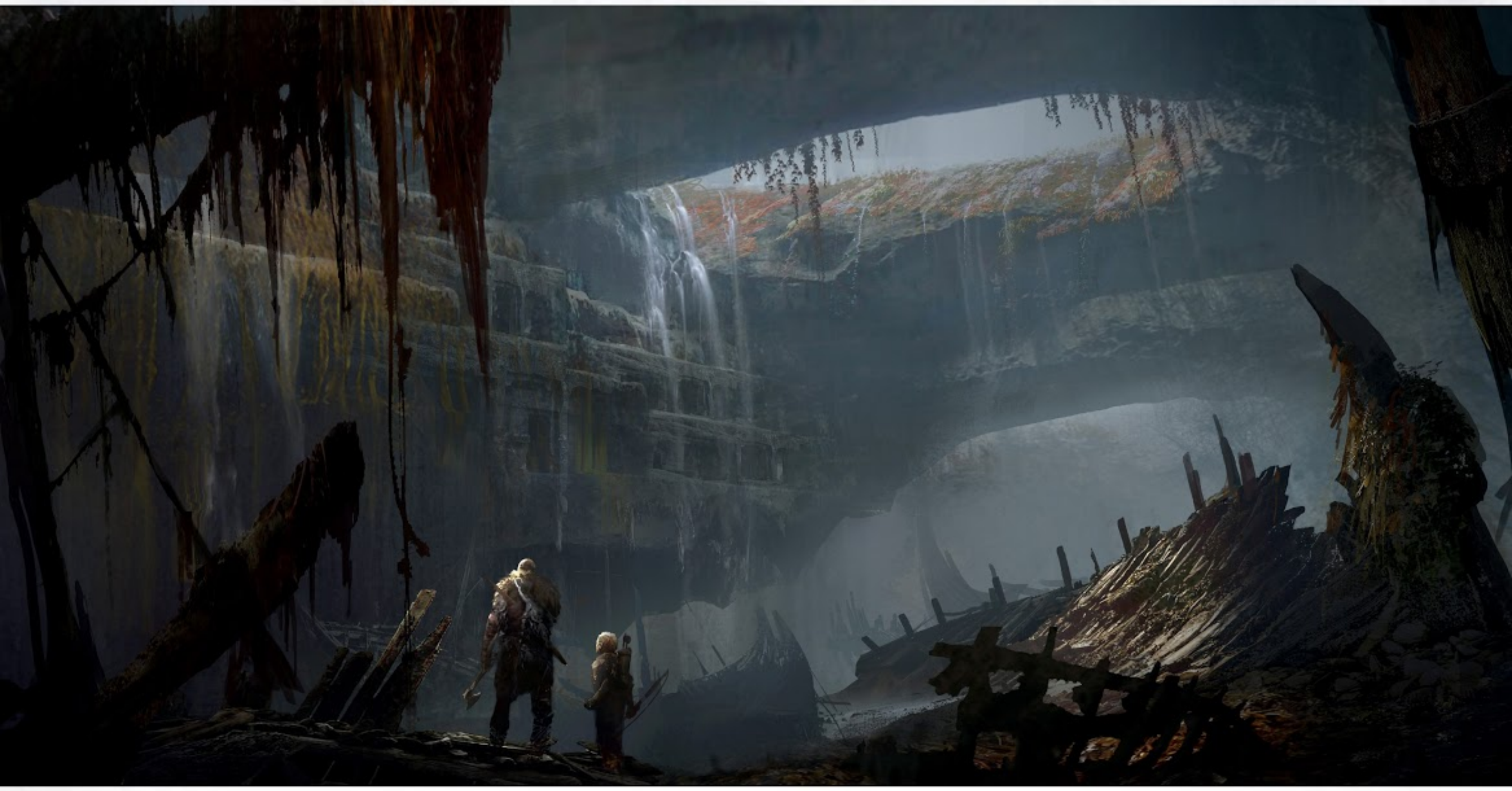


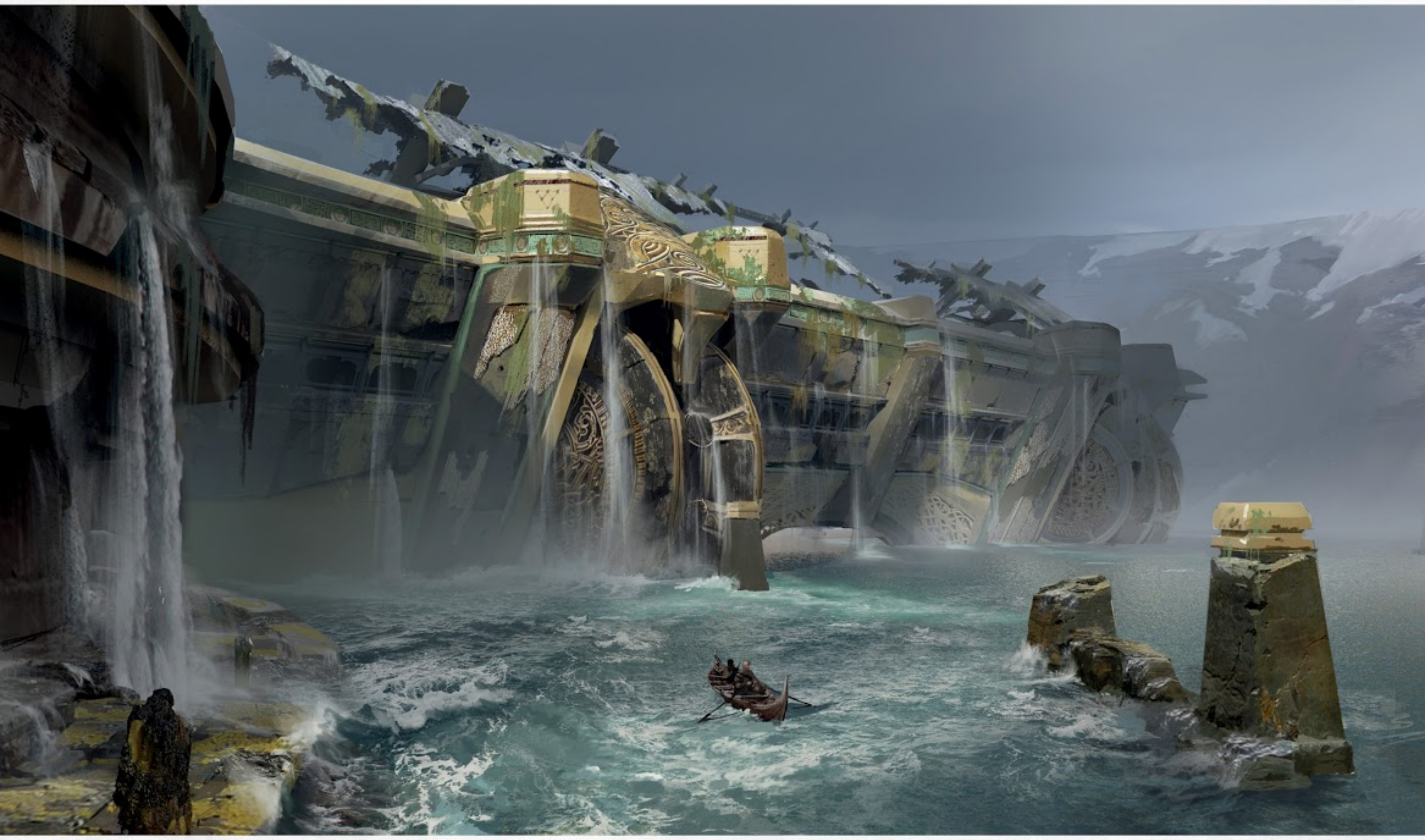






Unearthing Týr's Temple. Artists: Cliff Childs (middle, right); Luke Berliner





Artists: Cliff Childs (top); Luke Berliner (bottom)

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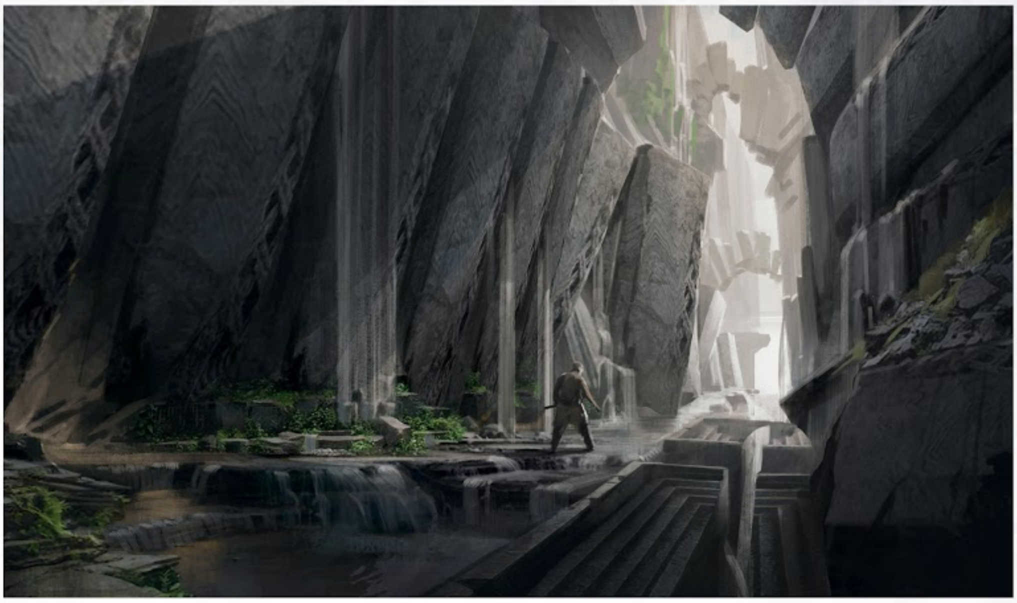
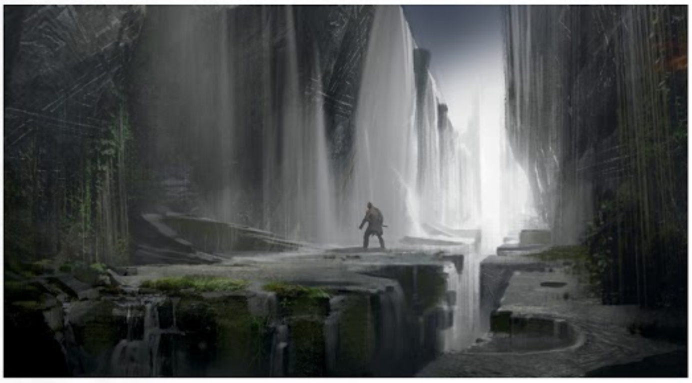
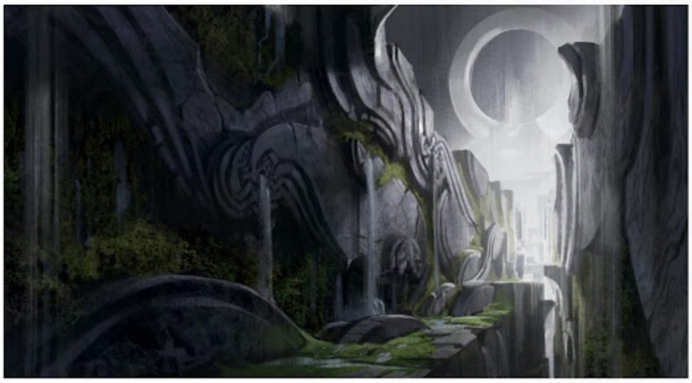
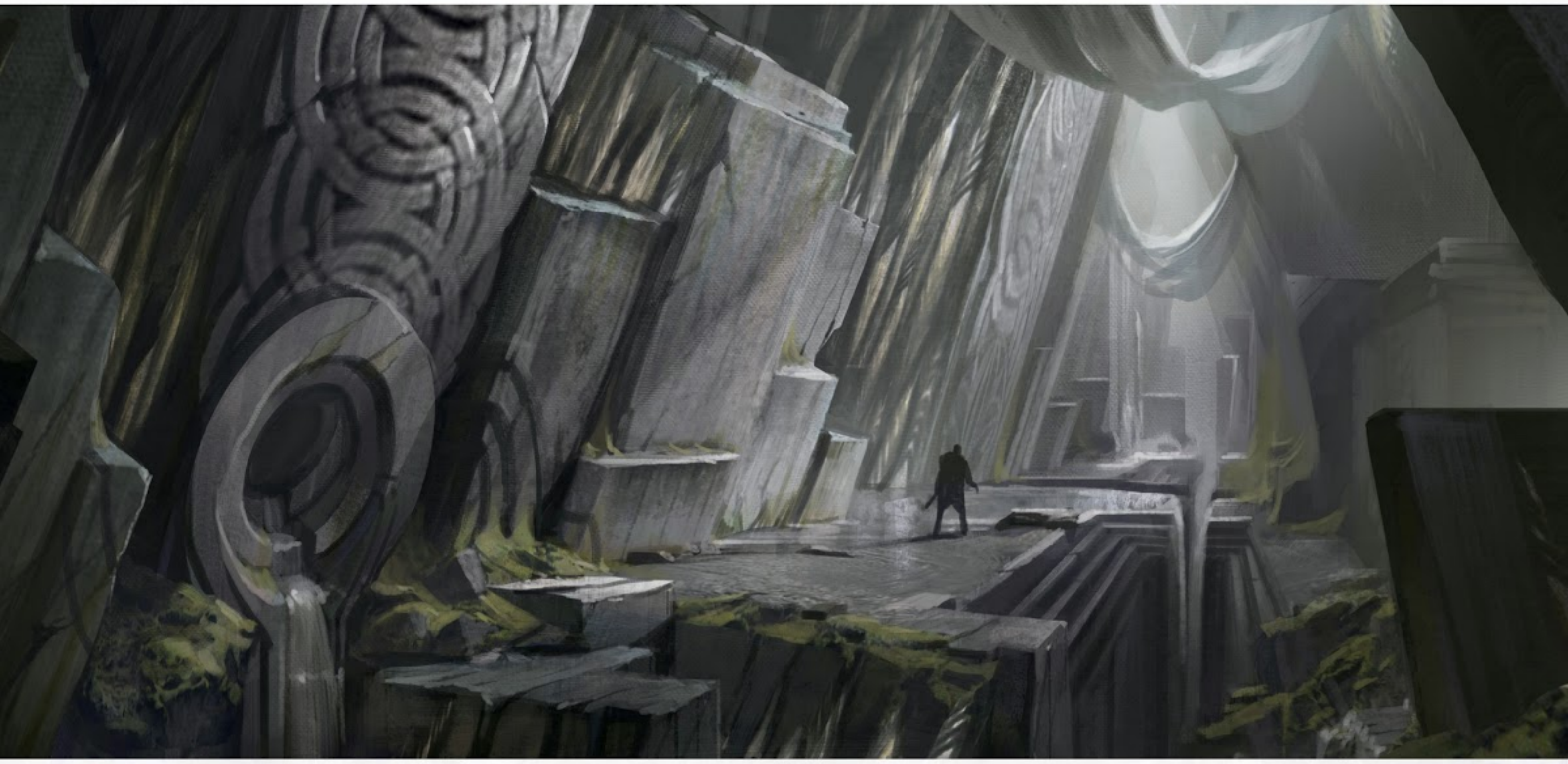
Many of the early designs for the trench were far too simple, but once the area began to develop a more serpentine aesthetic, it rapidly established the tone for the space moving forward. Unfortunately, it was much more difficult to produce a modular serpentine design, but the environment artists still brought the location to life in fantastic fashion.

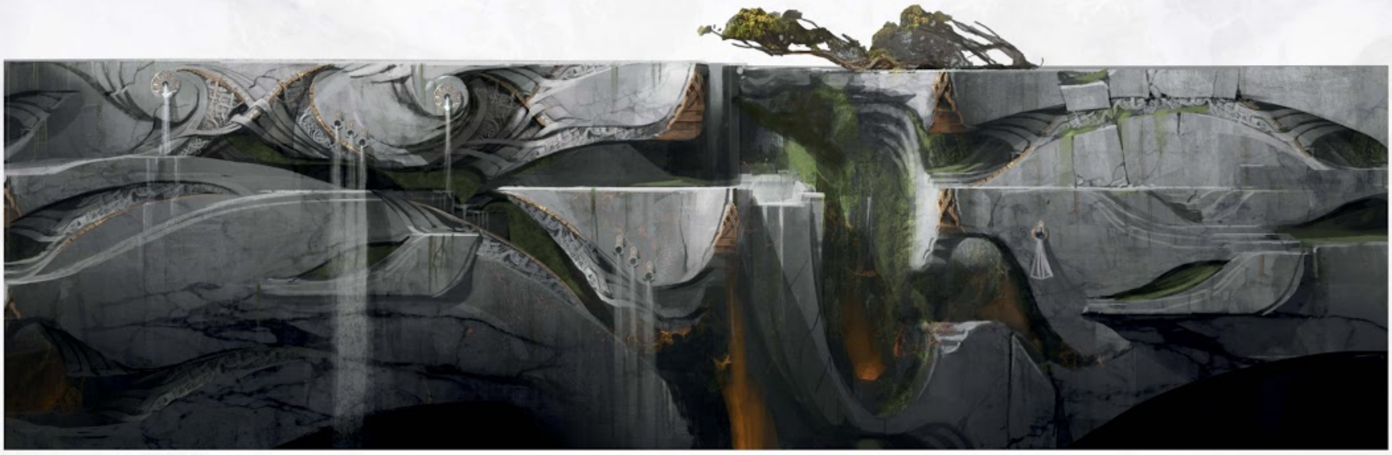


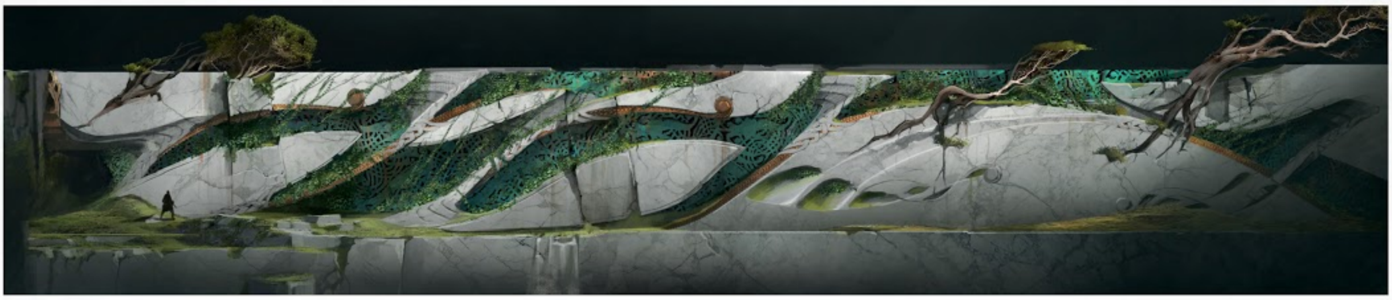


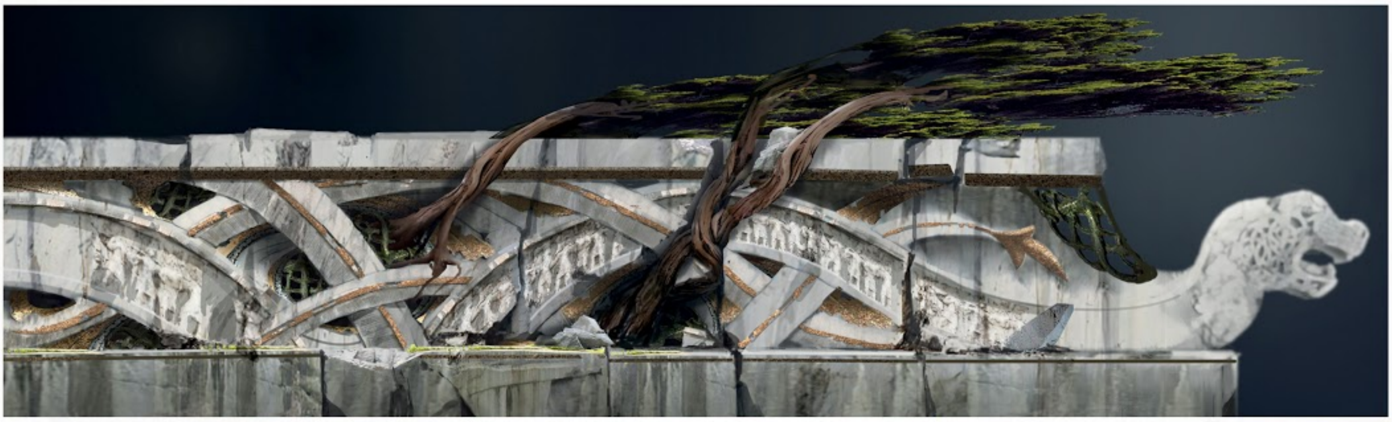


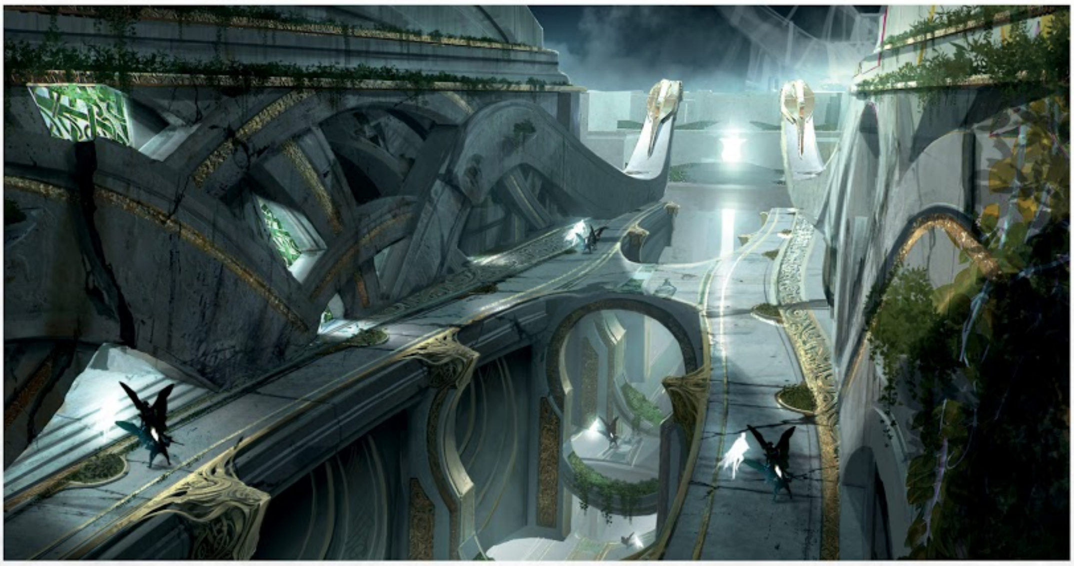


Álfheim's trench. Artists: Section Studios



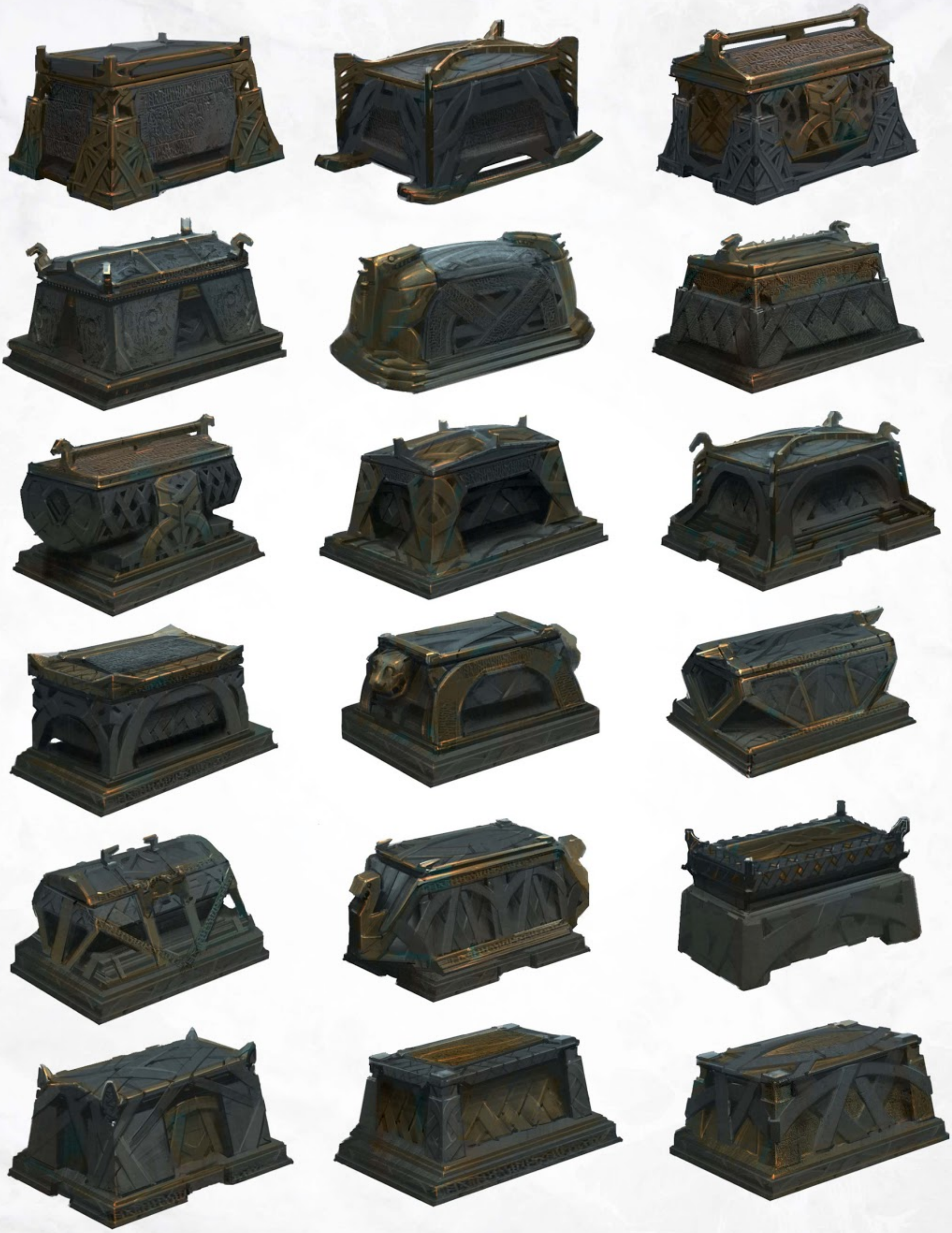




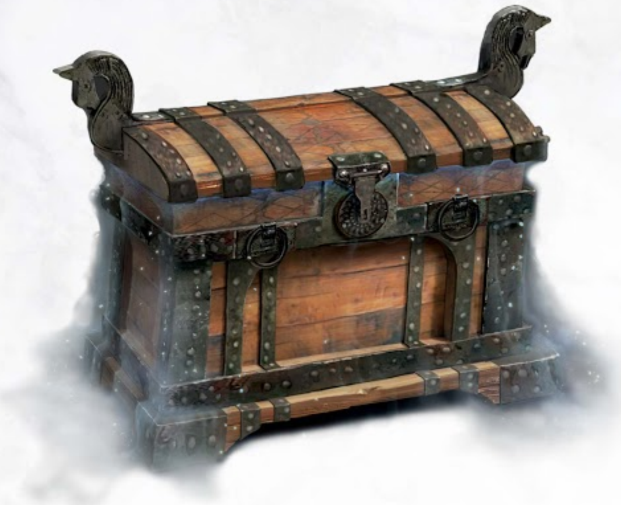


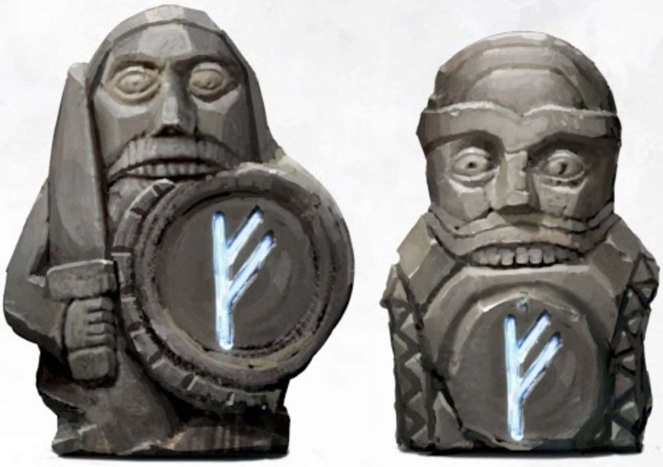
The storytelling goal of this location was to explain how the souls are deposited in the lake. Inspired by Norse weavings, the team crafted a design that tells the story of how a creature moved toward the temple as the souls went forward to seed new life in the other realms.

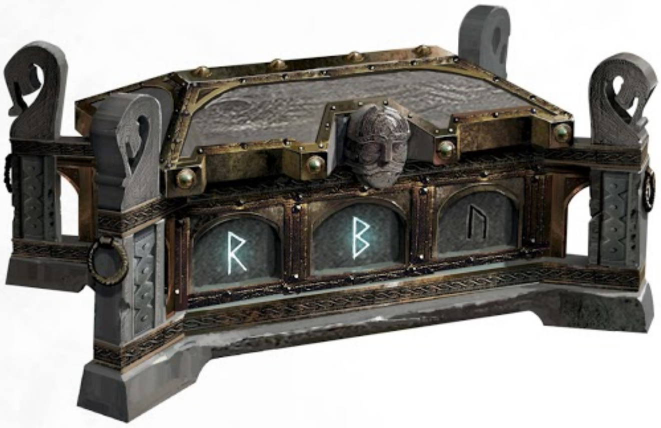
Artists: Section Studios, Yefim Kligerman, Mark Castanon

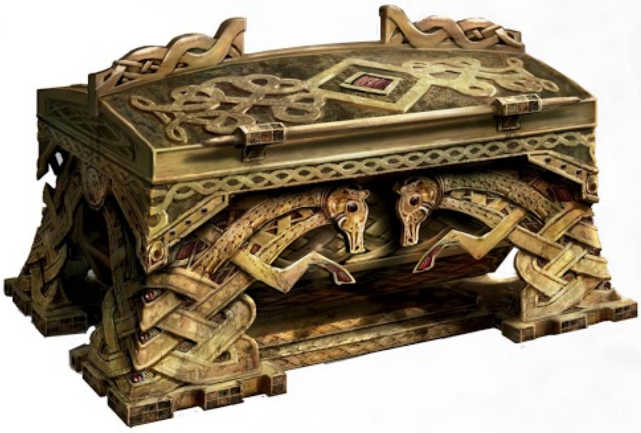


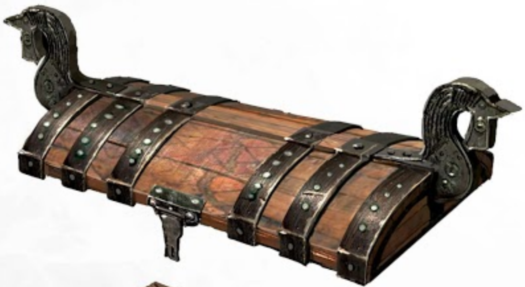
Riches of Midgard. Artists: Section Studios

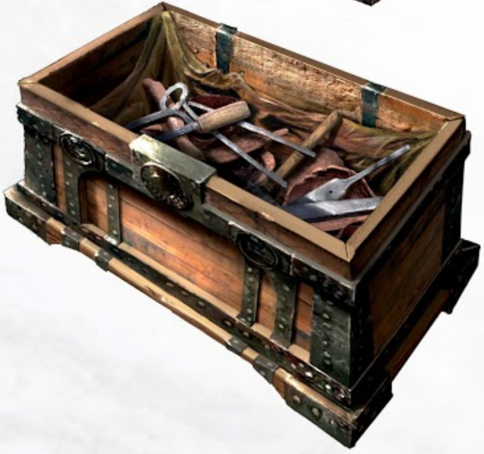


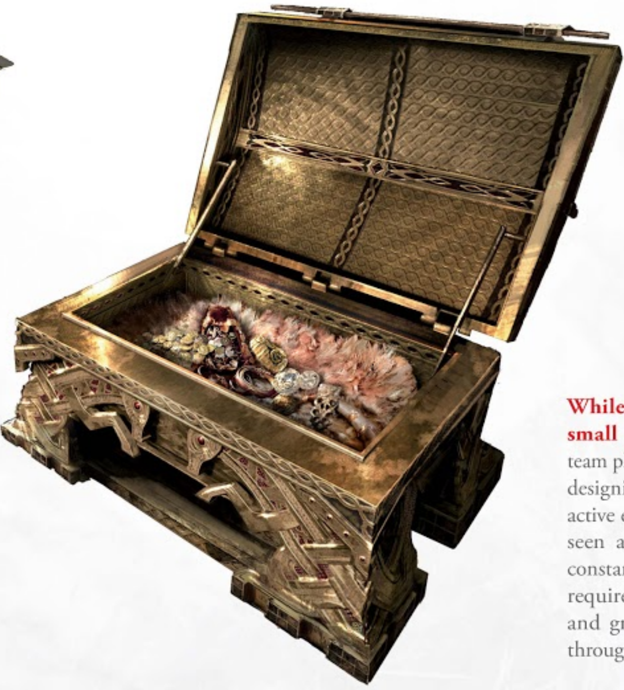










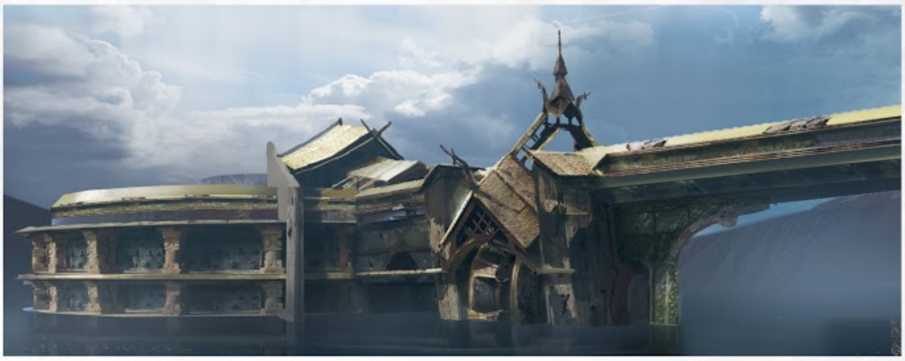


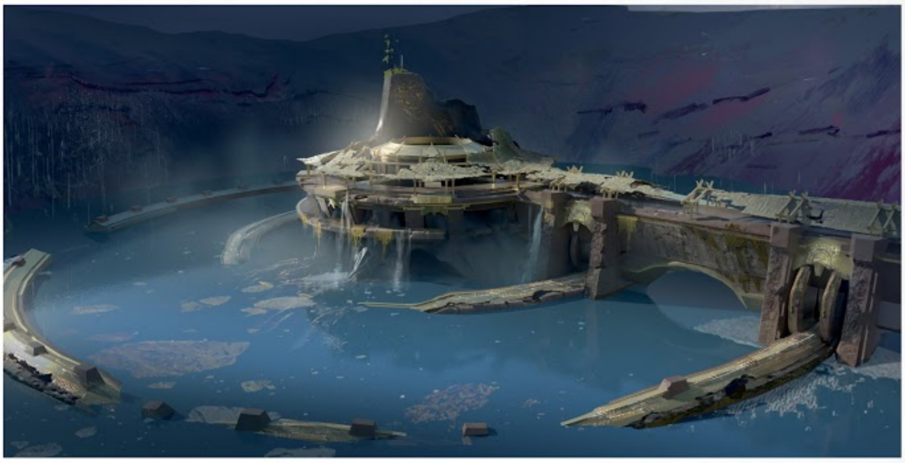
While many might overlook small props, the *God of War* team places a great deal of effort in designing chests and other interactive elements. It's a consistently seen asset that the player will constantly use, and the designers required that it be easy to find and gratifying to interact with throughout the entire game.

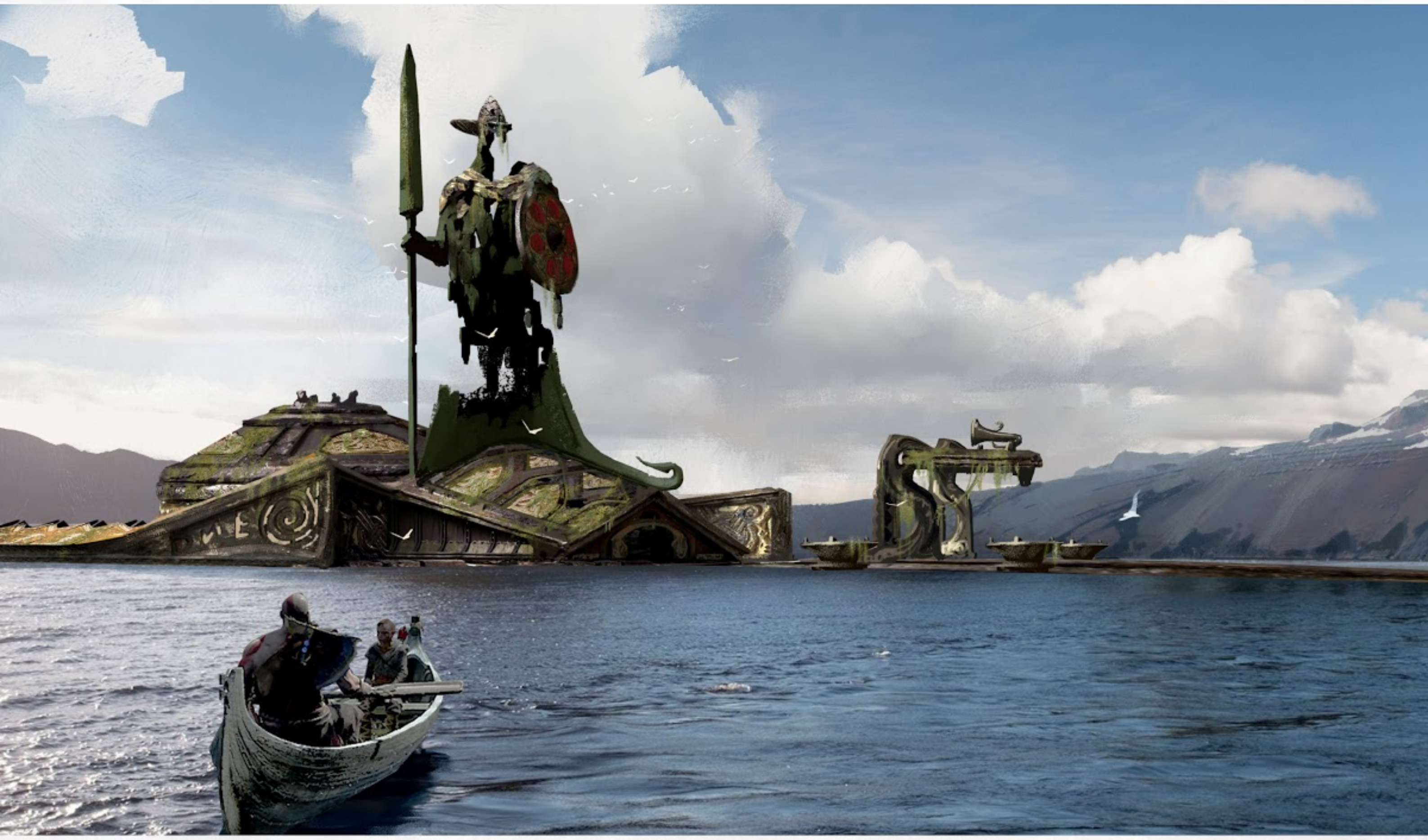
Artists: MOOD (middle right); Jin Kim

Originally, the Lake of Nine was going to be the hub of *God of War*—a grand temple built by Týr, allowing the gods to travel between the realms. The concept was that the other gods hated Týr, whom they perceived as extravagant, and that his temple was far too flashy. "Cory wanted the temple to almost be a temple to Týr himself," Luke Berliner recalled. "He always wanted the temple to be flooded, proposing that the World Serpent had come in and destroyed the temple, flooding the entire area."

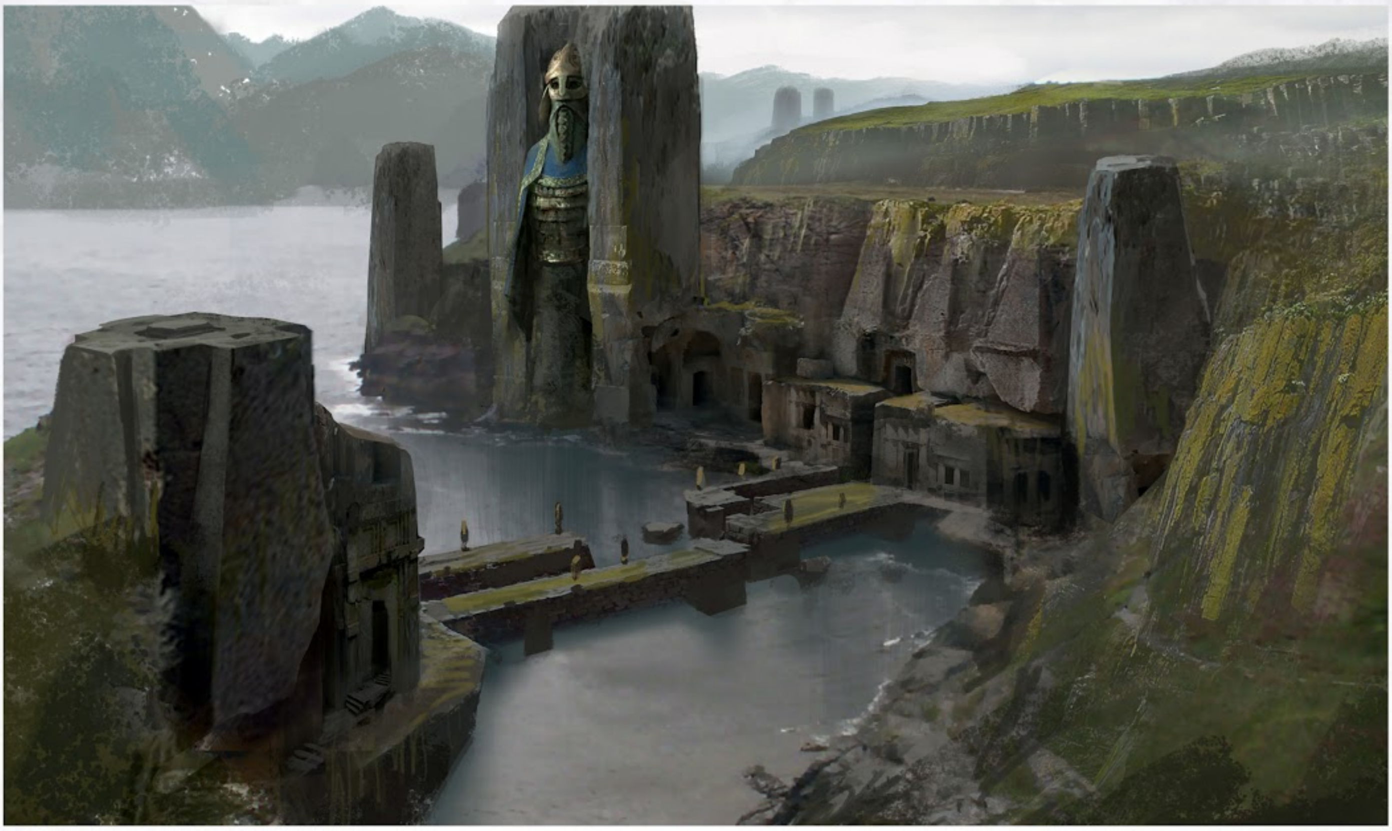
The early designs the team created, however, were never quite ostentatious enough. "But we finally hit on something when we proposed a design that acted as a compass, pointing at each realm the player would travel to," said Berliner. This ended up being translated by the level designers into a rotating bridge that pointed at the realm the player was to travel to.

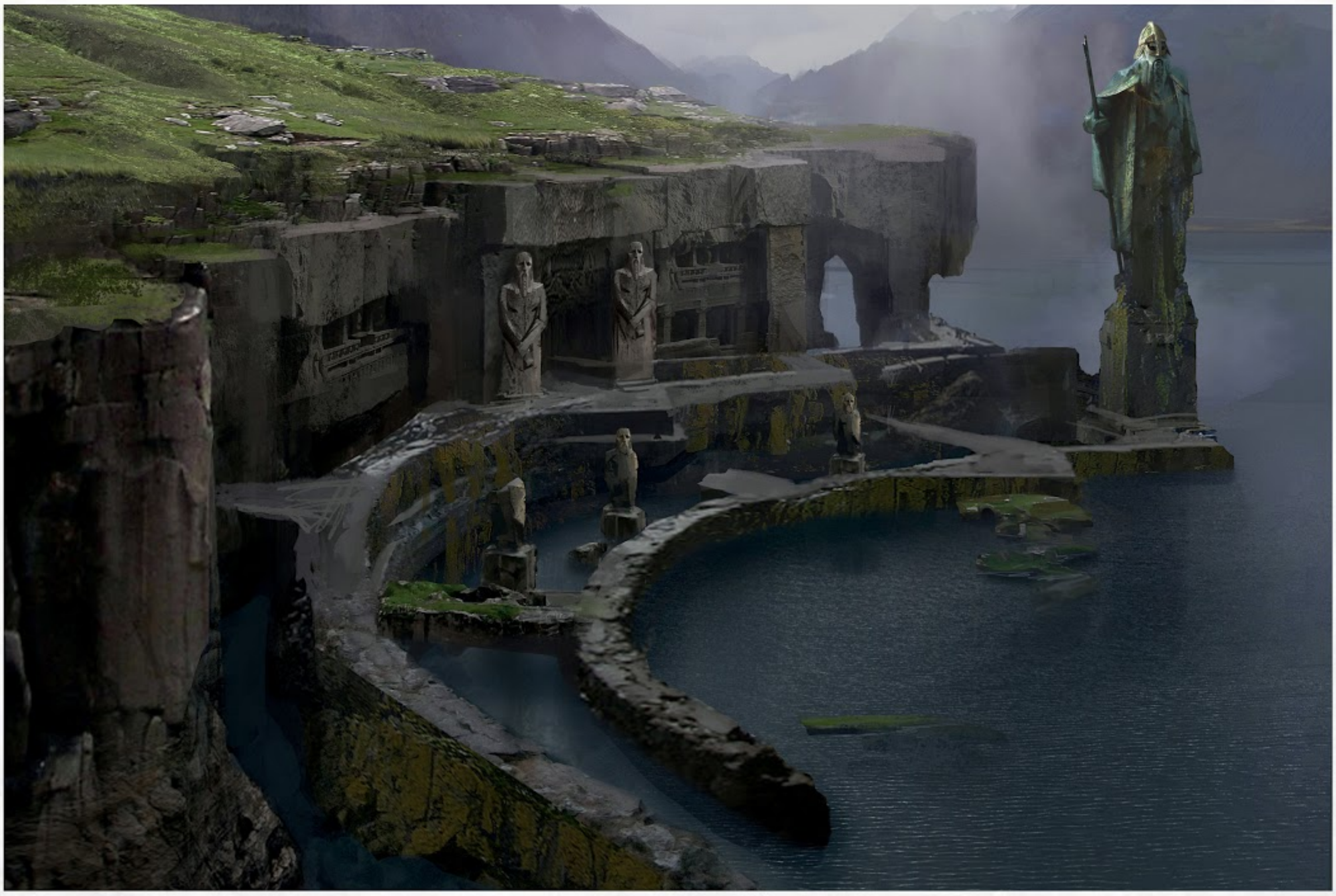






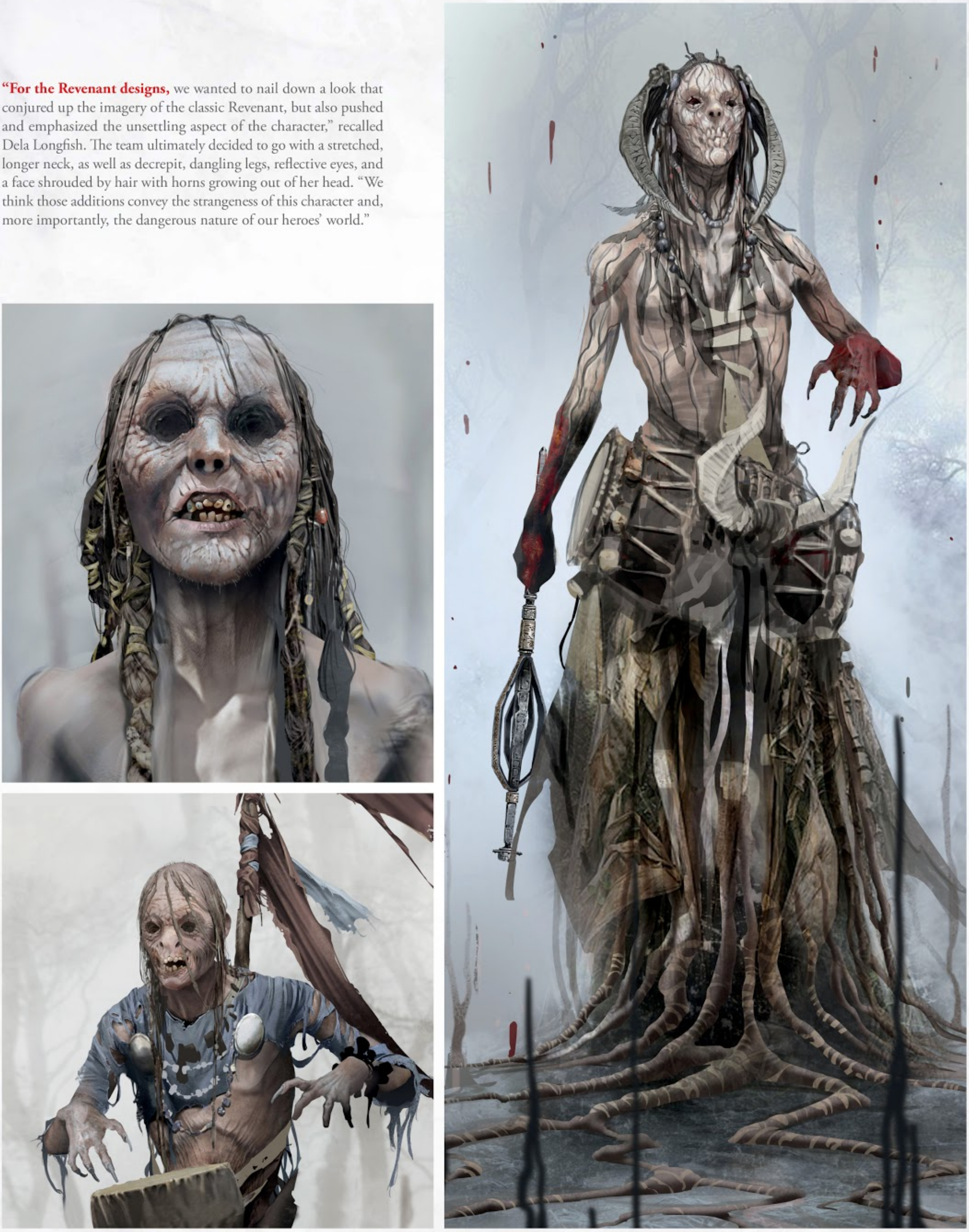
Artist: Luke Berliner



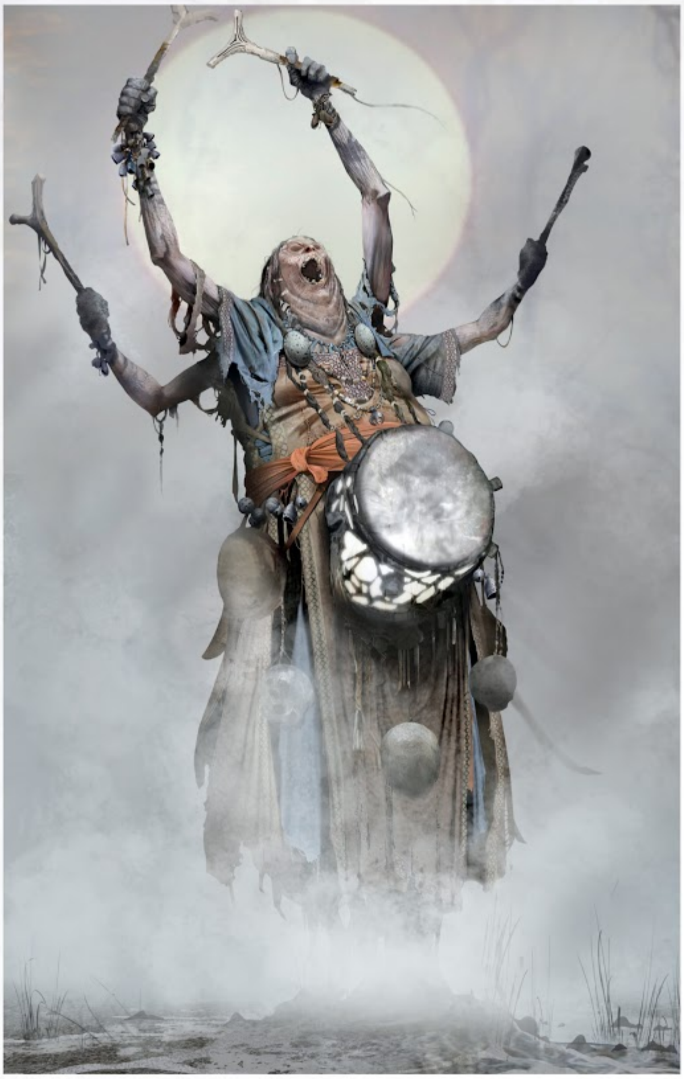


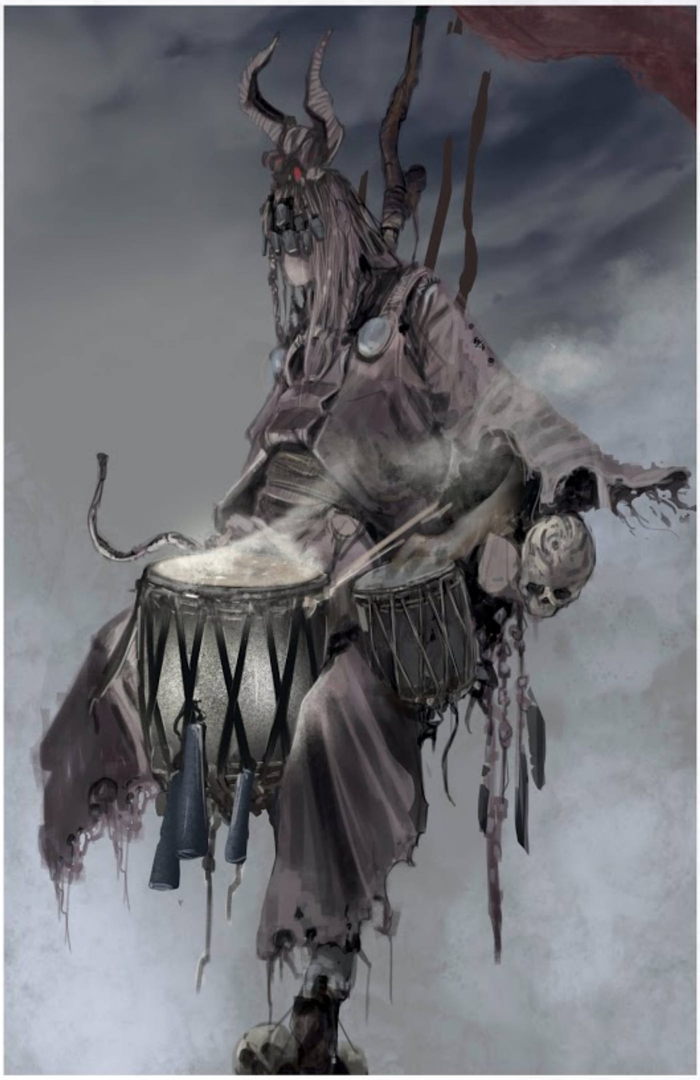
Artist: Cliff Childs

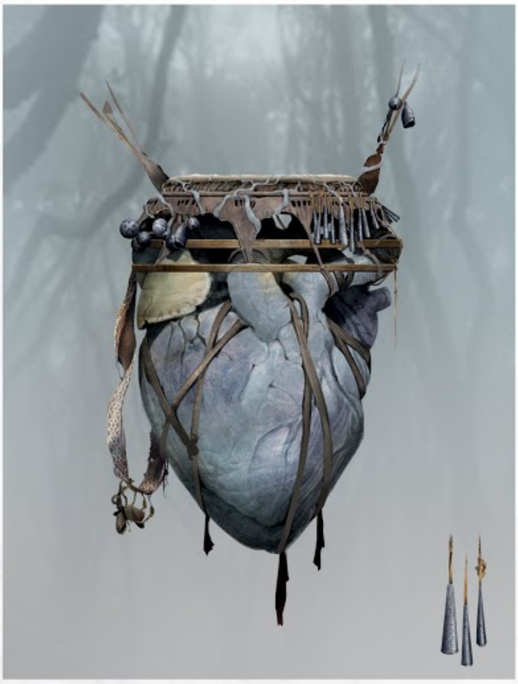
"For the Revenant designs, we wanted to nail down a look that conjured up the imagery of the classic Revenant, but also pushed and emphasized the unsettling aspect of the character," recalled Dela Longfish. The team ultimately decided to go with a stretched, longer neck, as well as decrepit, dangling legs, reflective eyes, and a face shrouded by hair with horns growing out of her head. "We think those additions convey the strangeness of this character and, more importantly, the dangerous nature of our heroes' world."

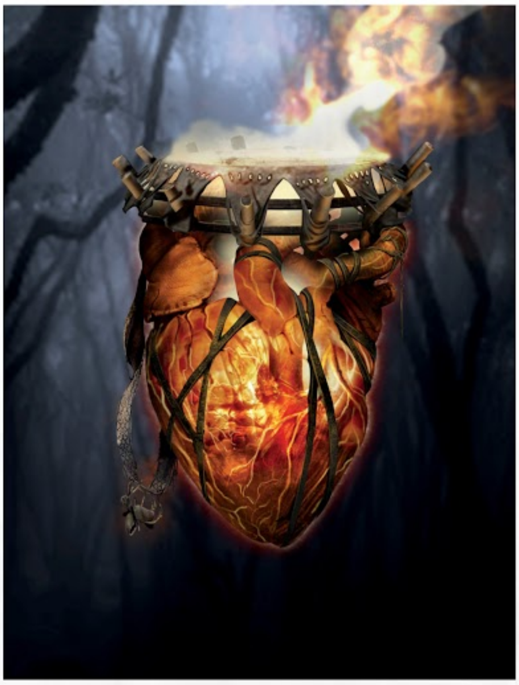


Exploring the many forms of the Revenant. Artist: Dela Longfish



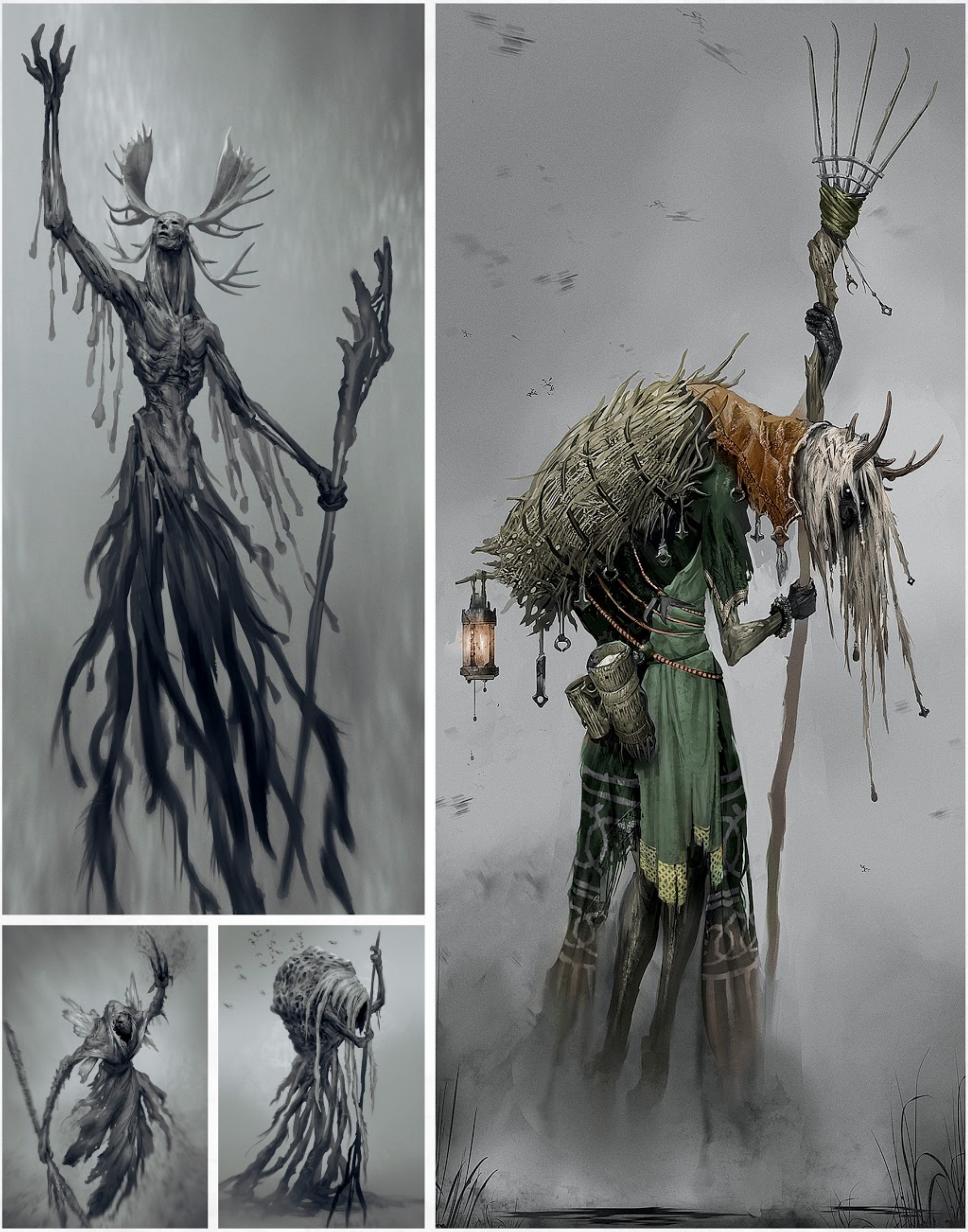






Artist: Dela Longfish

Like many early concepts we explore the "what if" of a character. By covering a wide range of ideas, this allows the director to pick what most fits their idea and in some cases can help expand on those ideas. These early Revenant concepts explored ideas like what if she sat perched high above the ground, or in contrast was rooted to the ground itself. Others explore the ideas of her magic being based on sound emanating from a drum of sorts. While none of these are part of the final design, they were all necessary steps to help the team arrive there.



Revenant design comes to fruition. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

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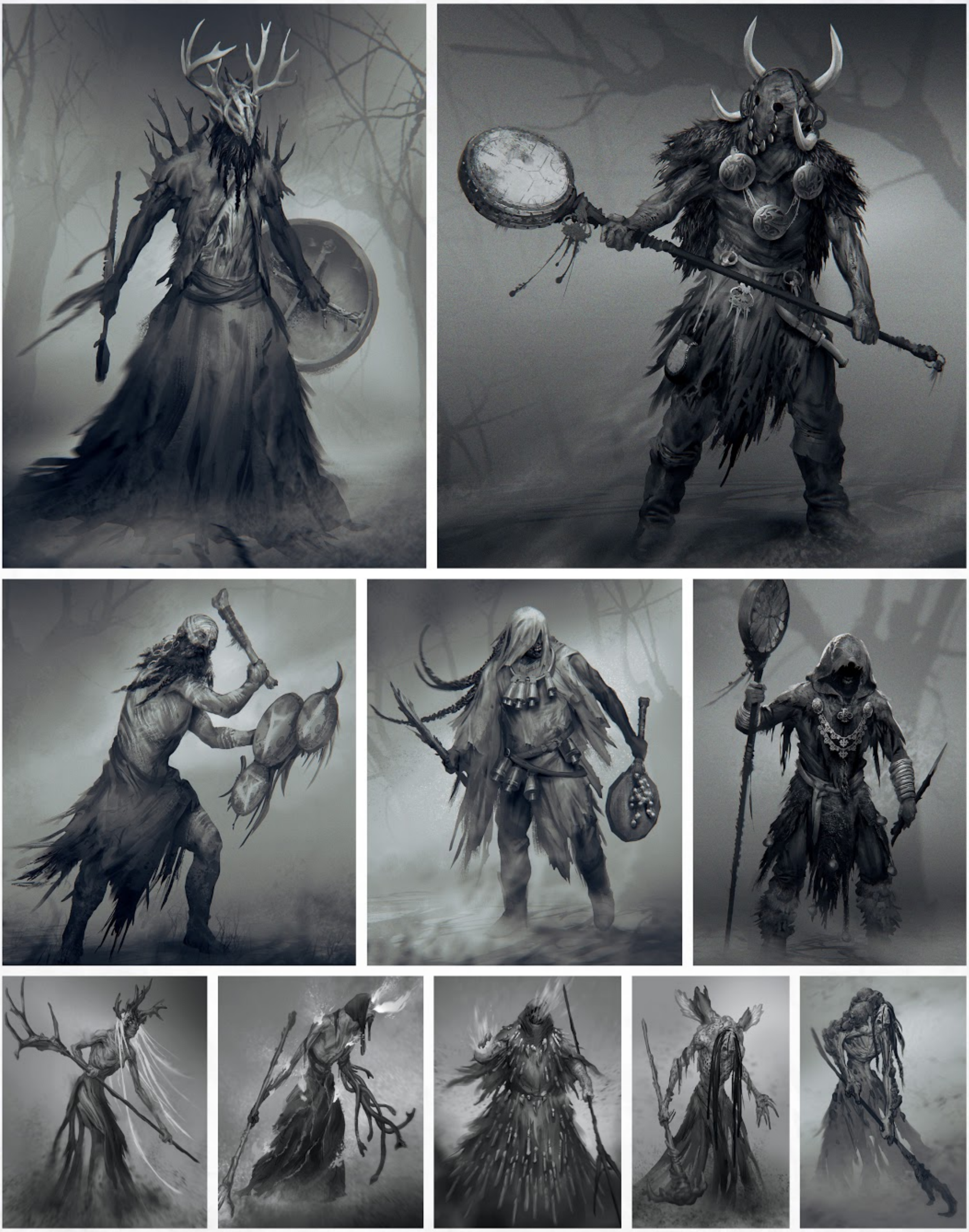
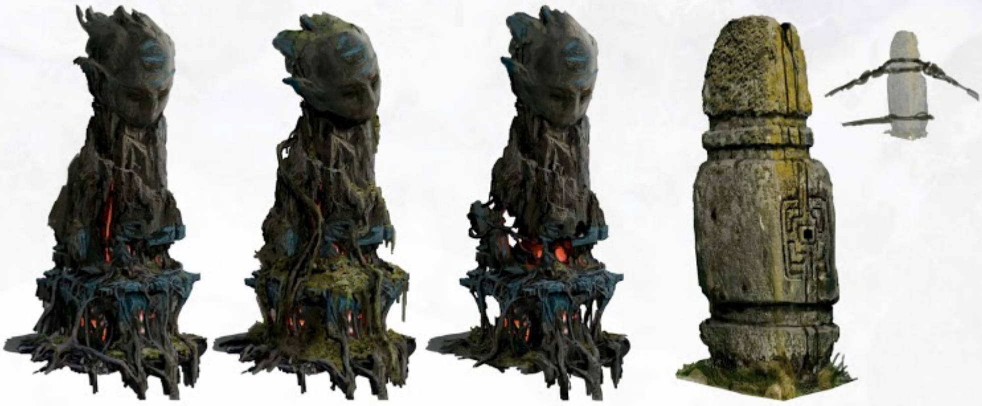
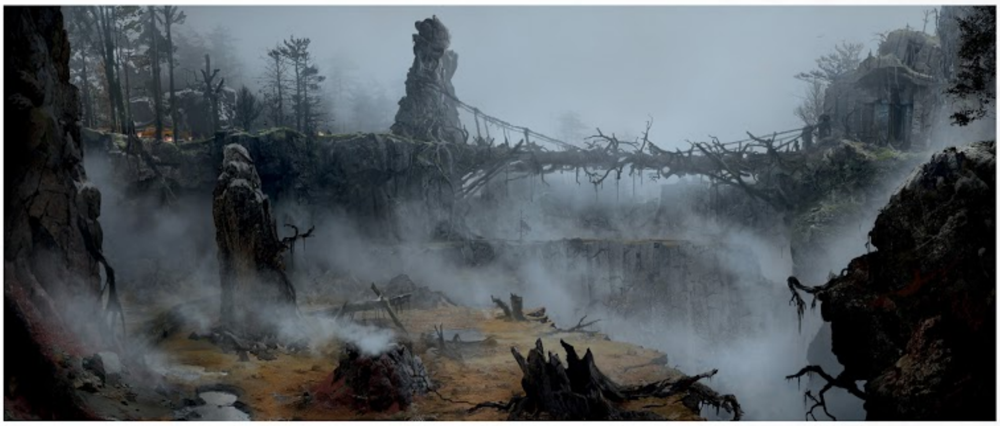
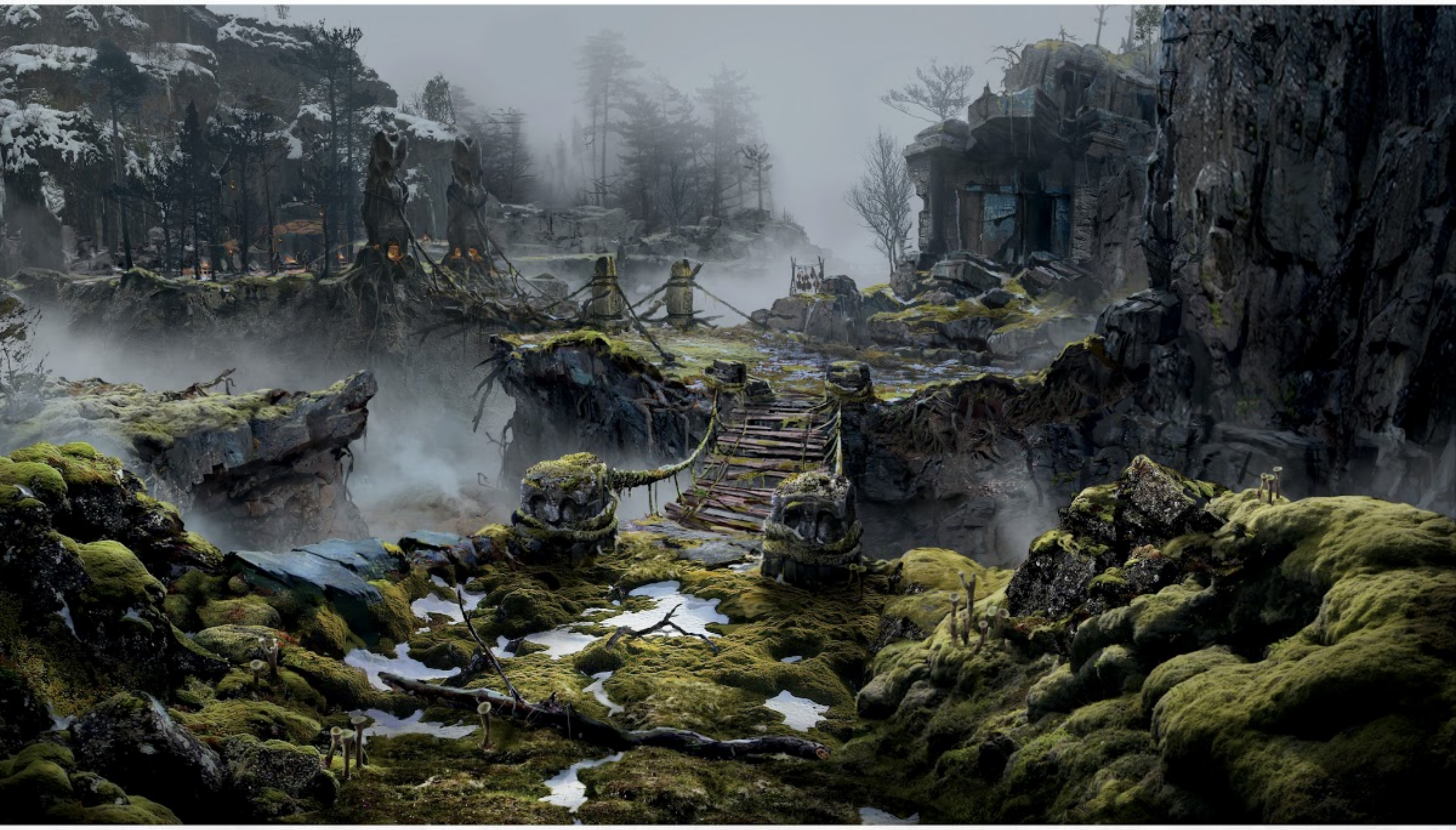


Artist: Yefim Kligerman

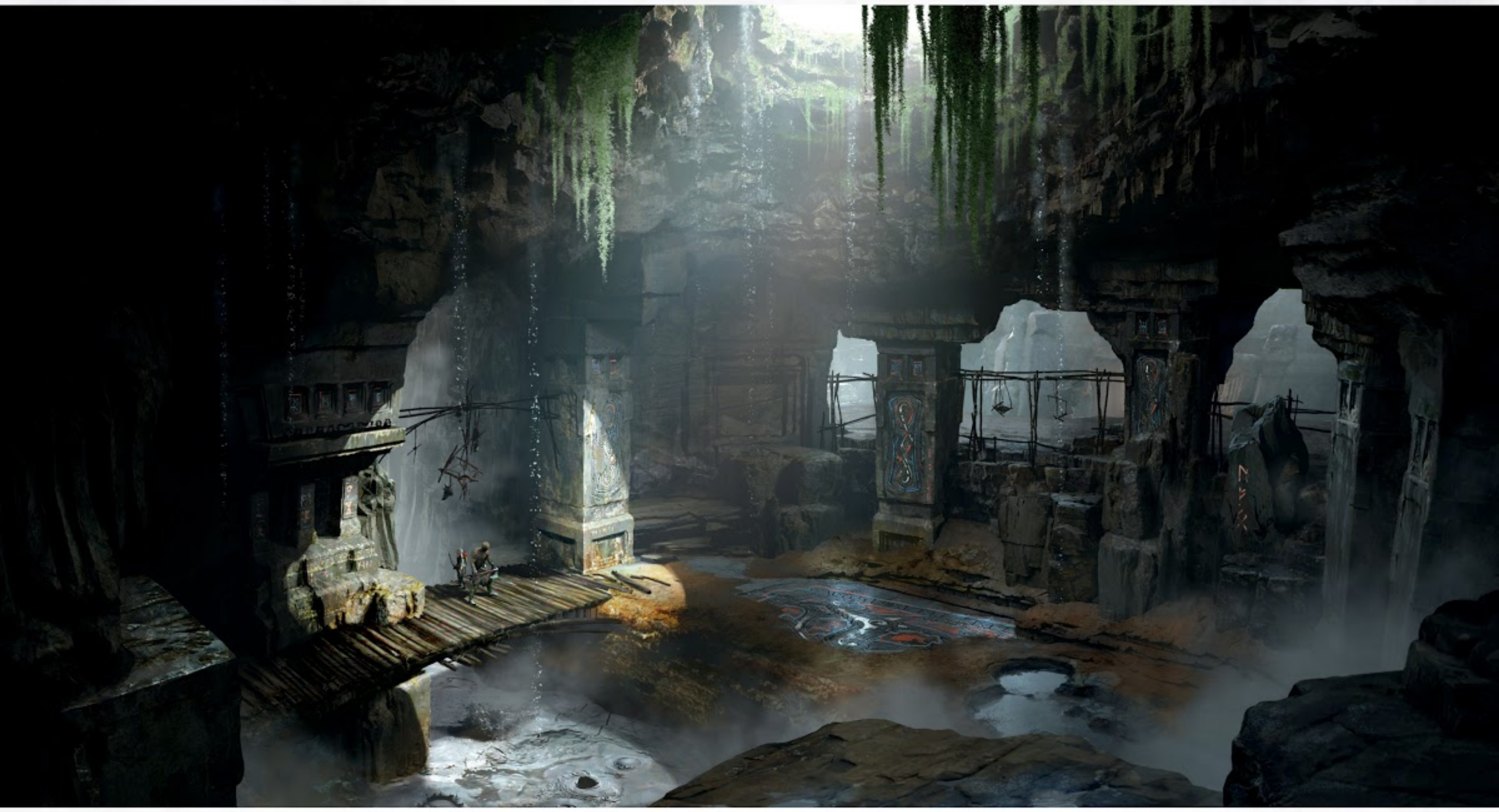


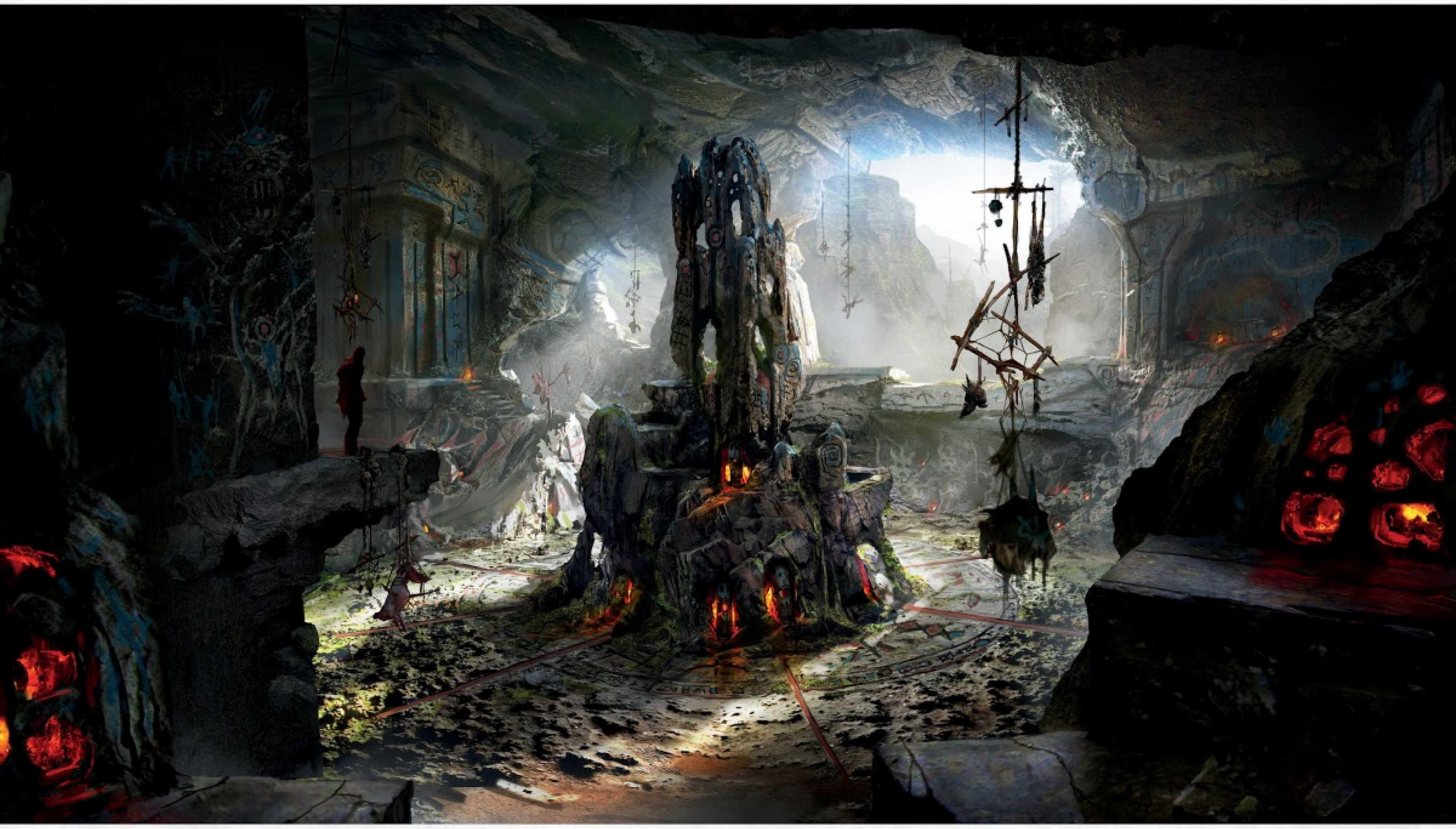
As Kratos and Atreus began their journey, the team needed to create a nice introduction into the world for the player—a taste of the dangers embedded in this world. “Our first stab at this was really much more somber, we wanted to start the journey off with a statement that this won’t be fun or safe but will be an adventure.” said Luke Berliner. “But we ended up making it much more optimistic after a lot of people played it and just felt depressed.” This level was very much inspired by the sulphur pits the team visited in Iceland early in development. “Just looking at these paintings reminds us of how bad they smelled,” said Berliner.



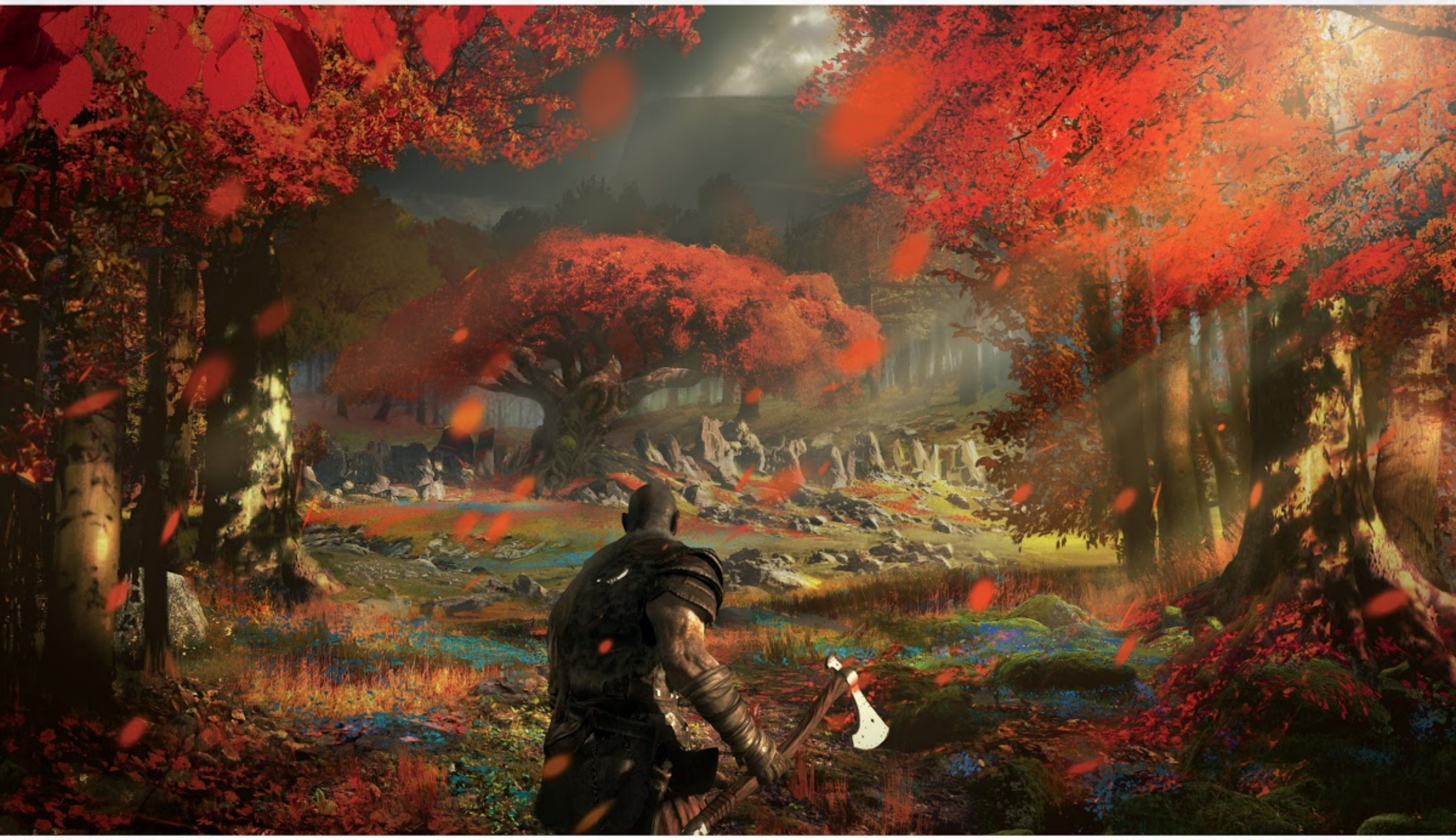


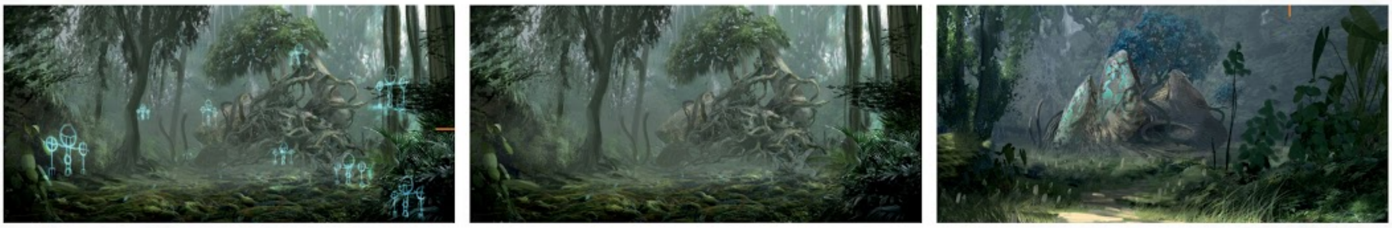
Dangers of the world. Artists: Yefim Kligerman, MOOD



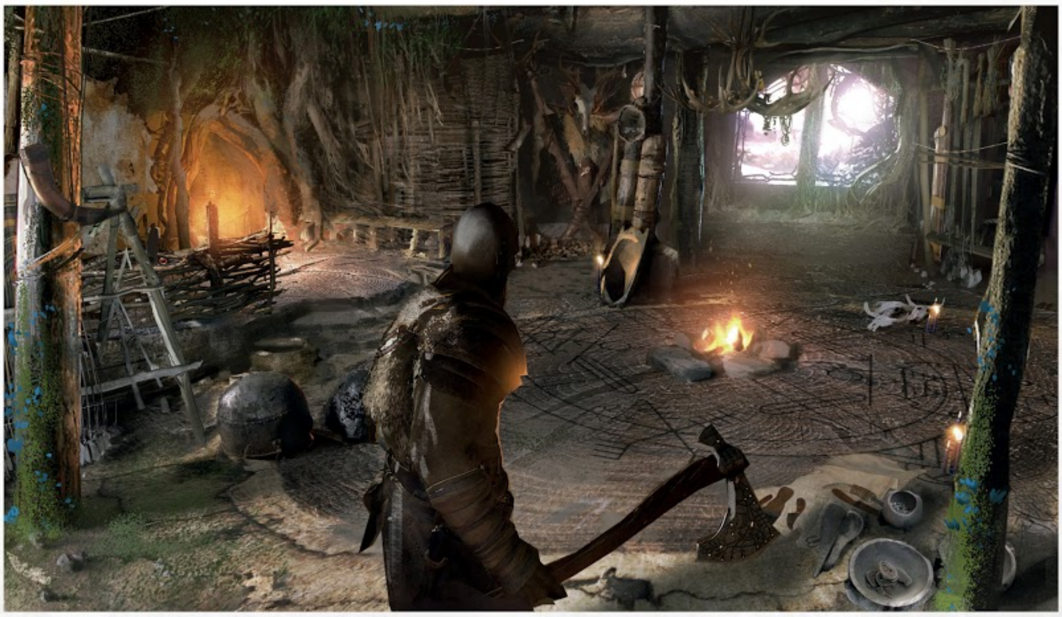


Artists: Mark Castanon, MOOD

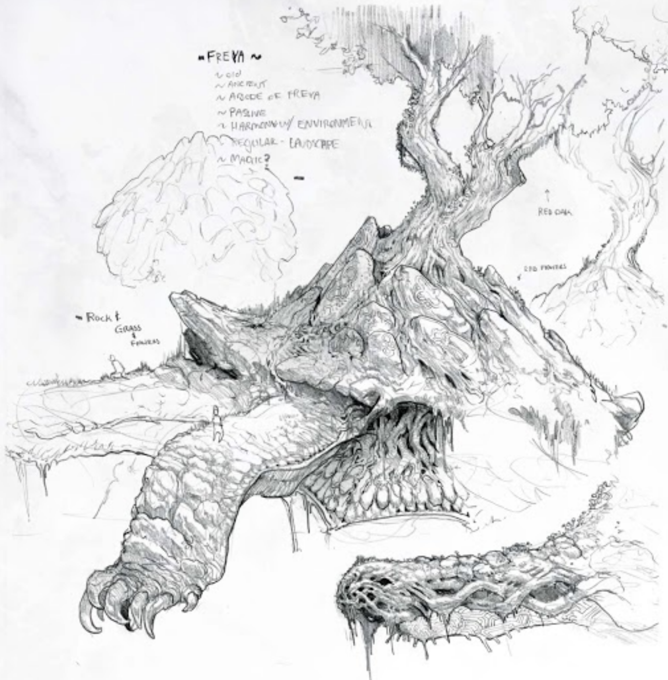


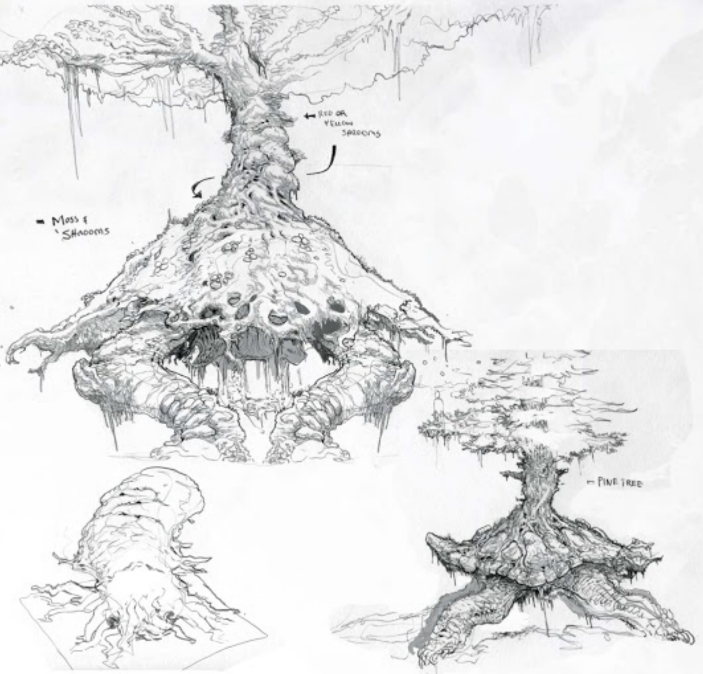


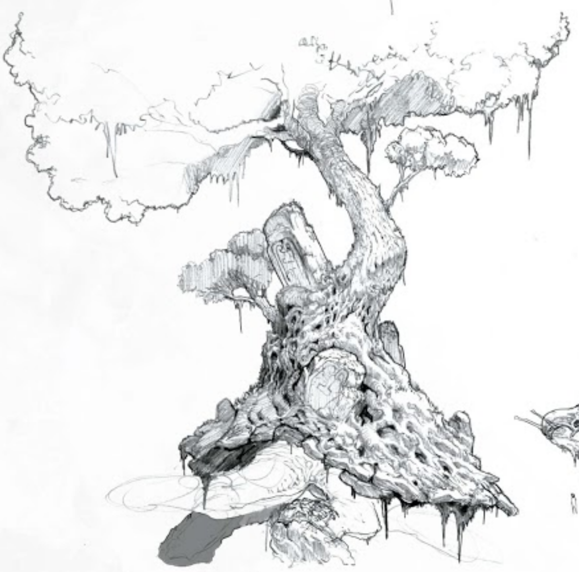
As development on *God of War* moved along, one key tactic the team employed was to assign specific colors to particular races and gods in its world. Yellow became the color for Atreus' mother, as well as the giants, while orange represented the Witch of the Woods.

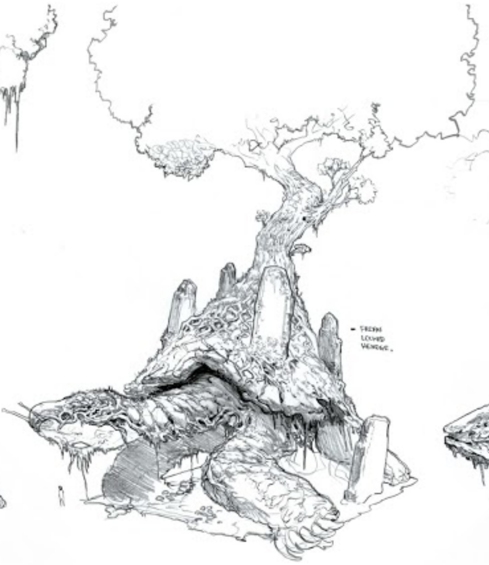


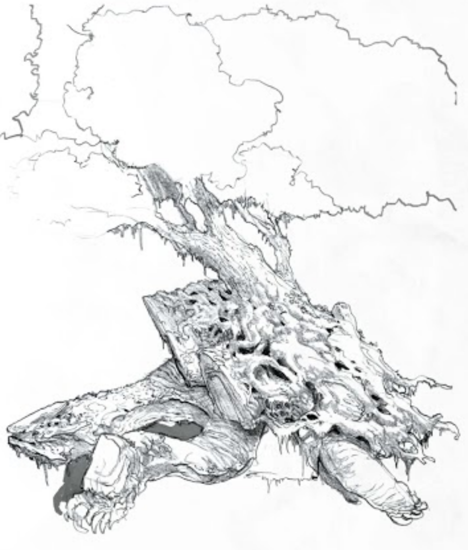
Witch of the Woods' home. Artists: MOOD (middle); Annis Naeem

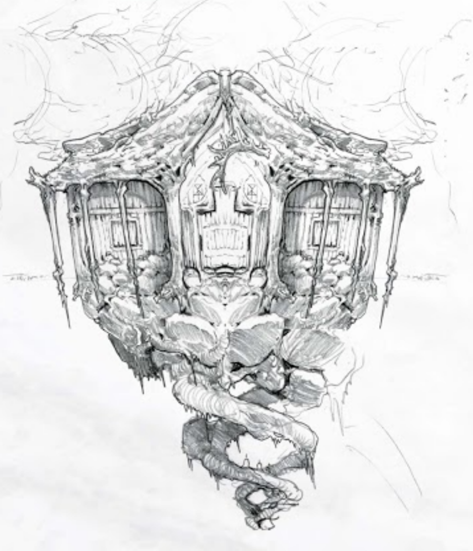

FREYA
~ old
~ ANCIENT
~ ABODE OF FREYA
~ PASSIVE
~ HARMONY W/ ENVIRONMENT
~ REGULAR - LANDSCAPE
~ MAGIC?
RED OAK
OLD FLOWERS
Rock & GRASS & FLOWERS

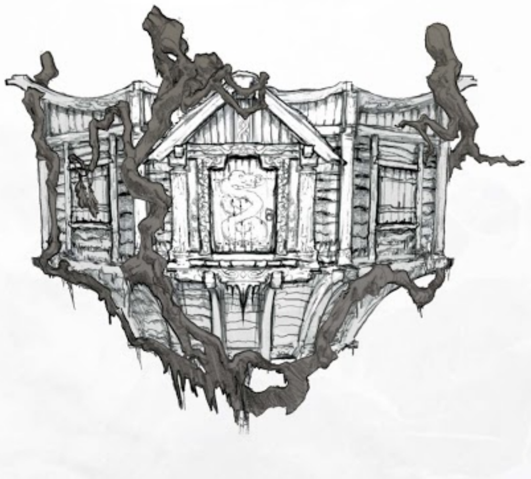

RED OR YELLOW SHROOMS
Moss & SHROOMS
PINE TREE





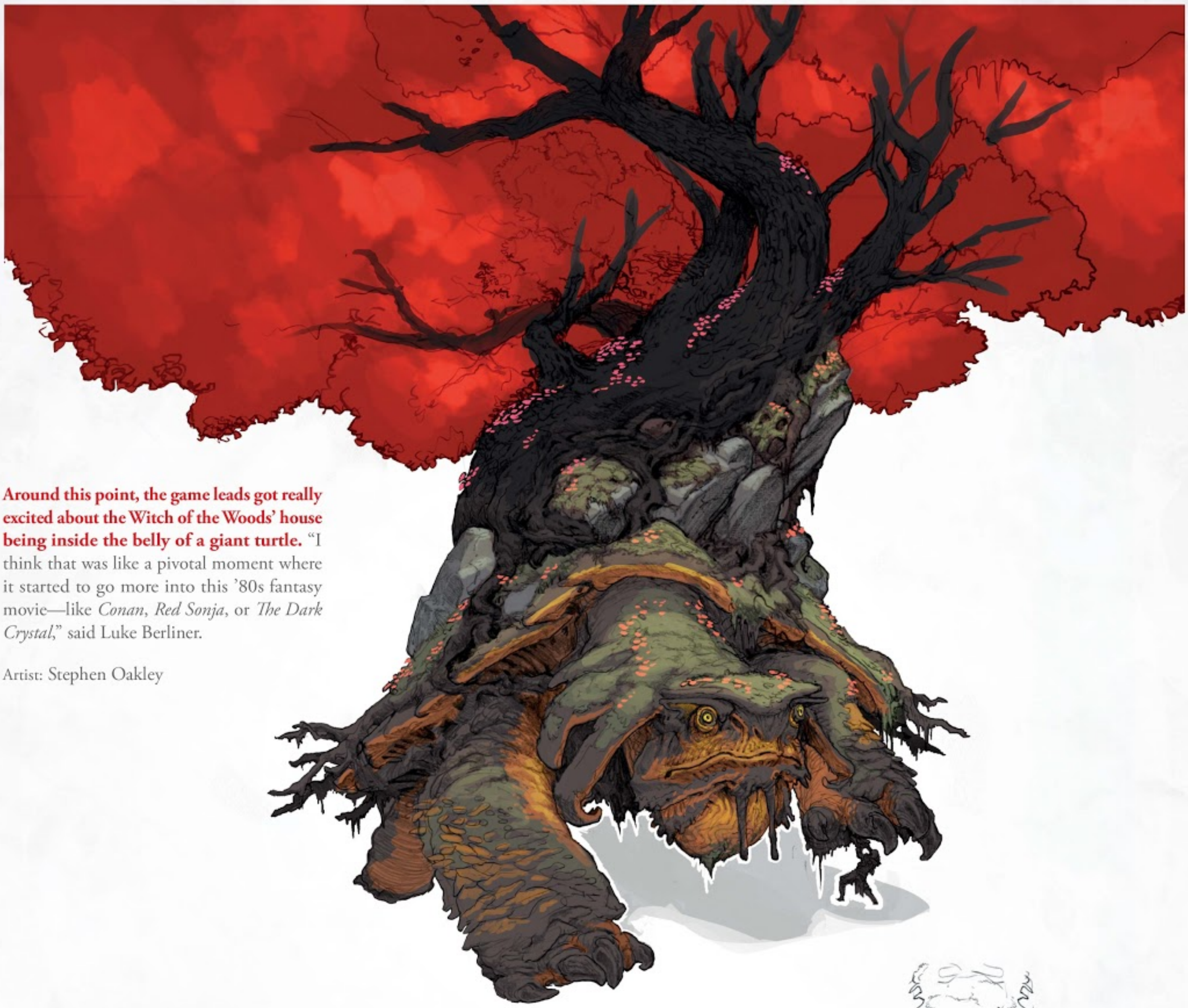






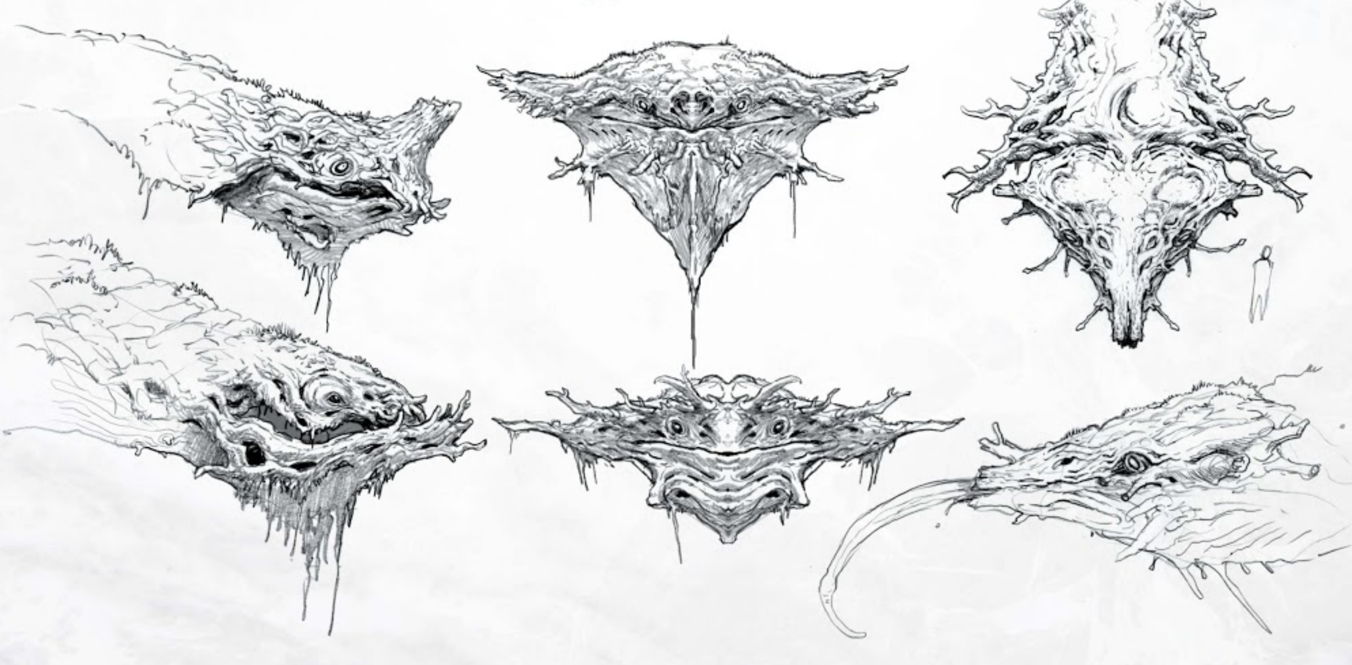
Witch of the Woods became a pivotal character in the DNA of the game. Cory Barlog wanted her to live in a magical woods, so it made sense to give her a more vivid forest in which to live. As the player moves toward her home, the leaves start to turn to a blood orange color, and things begin to feel much more magical.

Artist: Stephen Oakley



Around this point, the game leads got really excited about the Witch of the Woods' house being inside the belly of a giant turtle. "I think that was like a pivotal moment where it started to go more into this '80s fantasy movie—like *Conan*, *Red Sonja*, or *The Dark Crystal*," said Luke Berliner.

Artist: Stephen Oakley



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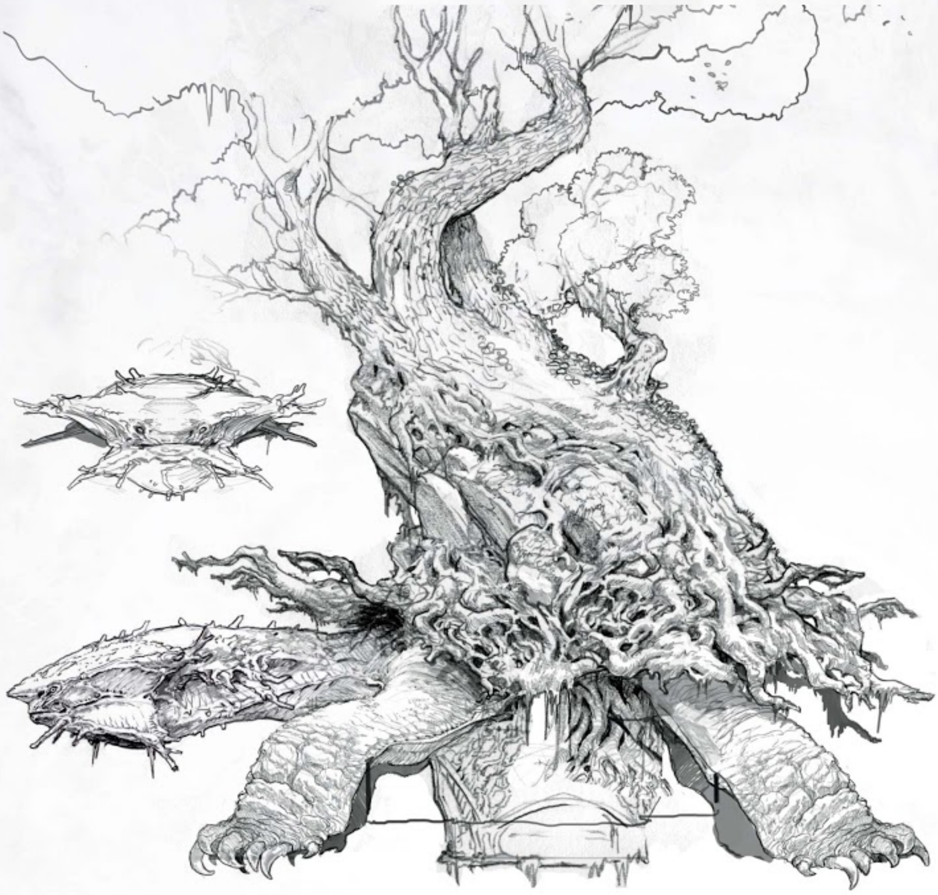
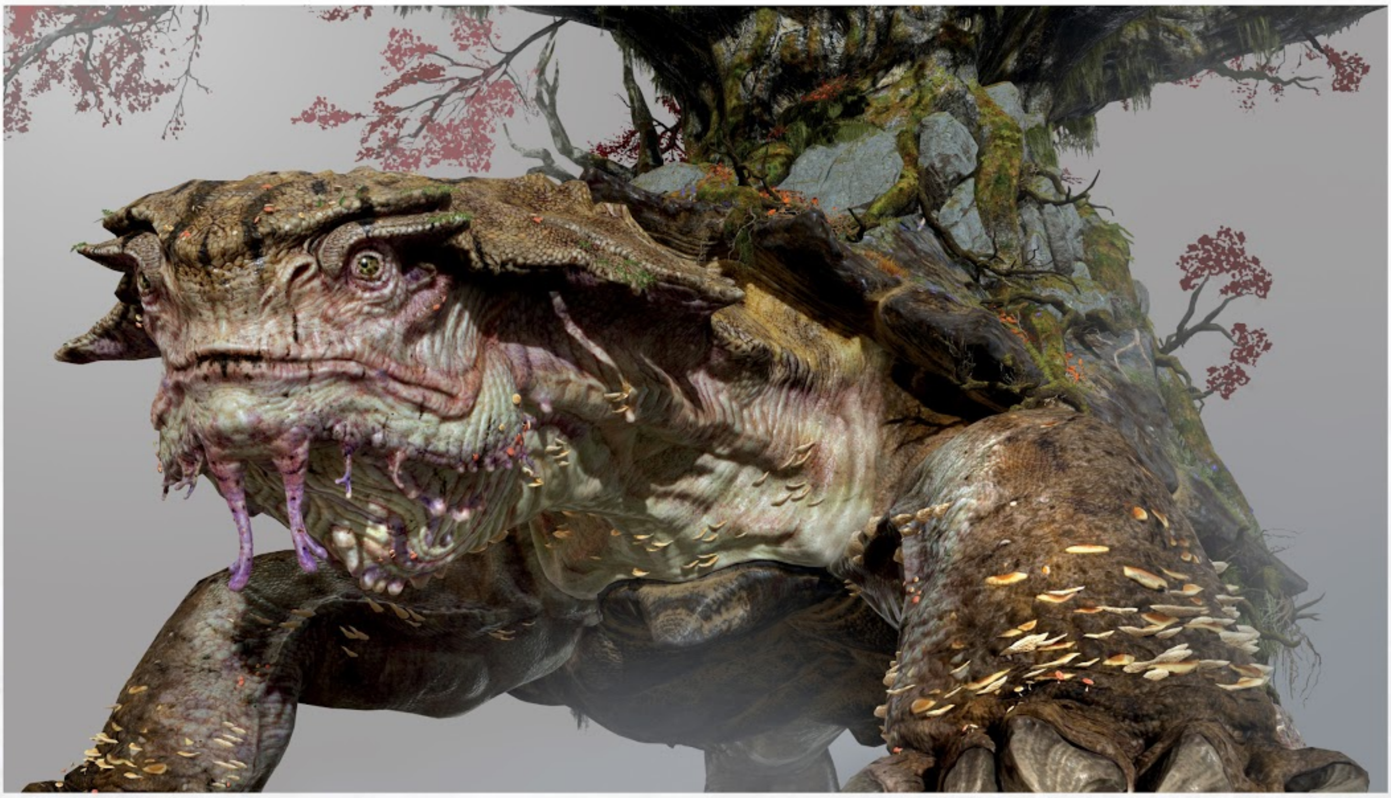


"It was like, 'okay—this can go bad very easily,'" recalled Dela Longfish. At this point, concept artist Stephen Oakley had come onboard, and this was his first task: to create a turtle with a house on it that still felt believable. "It was a lot of fun trying to figure out how to make the Witch of the Woods' house creature work and still look cool," Oakley remembered. "Definitely trying to keep it within the realm of the real—but, you know . . . *it's a giant turtle.*"

Oakley found himself going back into the '80s and '90s for inspiration. "There's a lot of character in big creature films like *The Neverending Story*—a lot of personality that definitely helped inform this creature," he said. "It originally started as something that you might be scared of, but then further down the line we were taking that kind of inspiration and turning her into this powerful, but still friendly being."

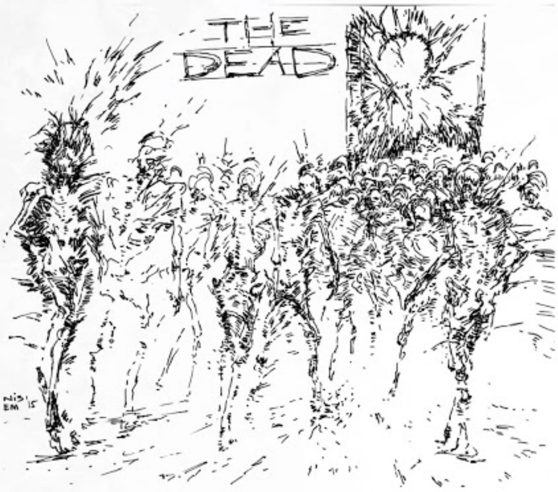
Berliner wasn't fully sold on the idea at the time, feeling that it was at odds with the more realistic tone for which the game had been striving, " . . . like having Falcor in *The Road*." This soon generated a great deal of conversation regarding the game's established art direction, and whether or not they were taking full advantage of the mythology. "With a slight shift in the wind, we incorporated a deeper sense of magic, thinking about the wonder and excitement Atreus might be feeling on this journey," said Berliner. "That's when things really started coming together."

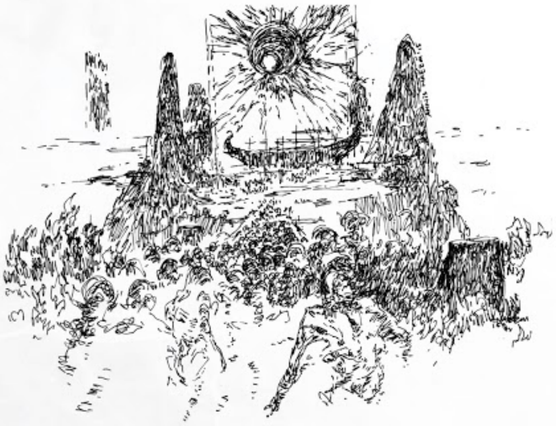


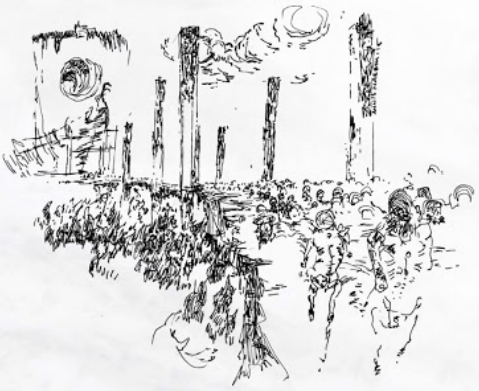
Designing a friendly creature. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Rafael Grassetti, Glauco Longhi (bottom)

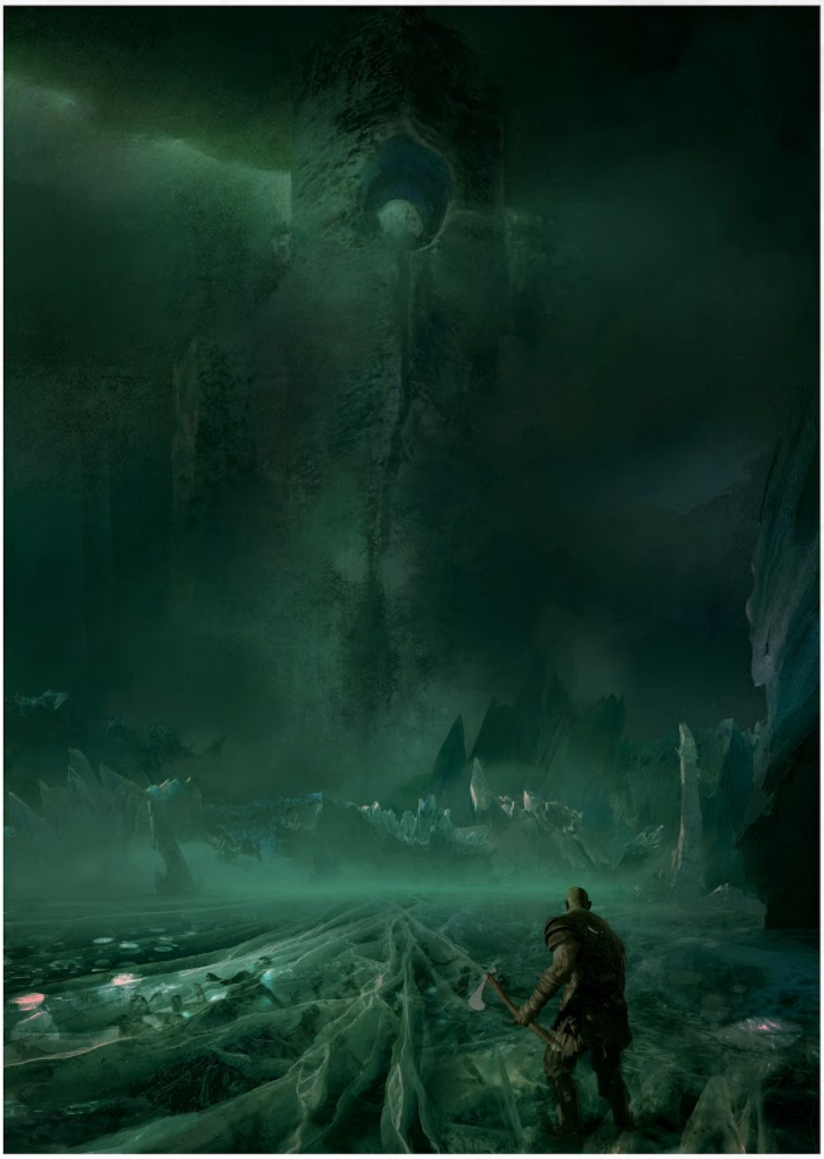
“At this point we’d worked on Helheim on and off for a long, long time, and nothing was really sticking,” recalled Luke Berliner. “The team was starting to get frustrated, Cory Barlog didn’t think anything looked cold enough, and many of the artists didn’t feel that they’d nailed down an interesting architecture for the level.”

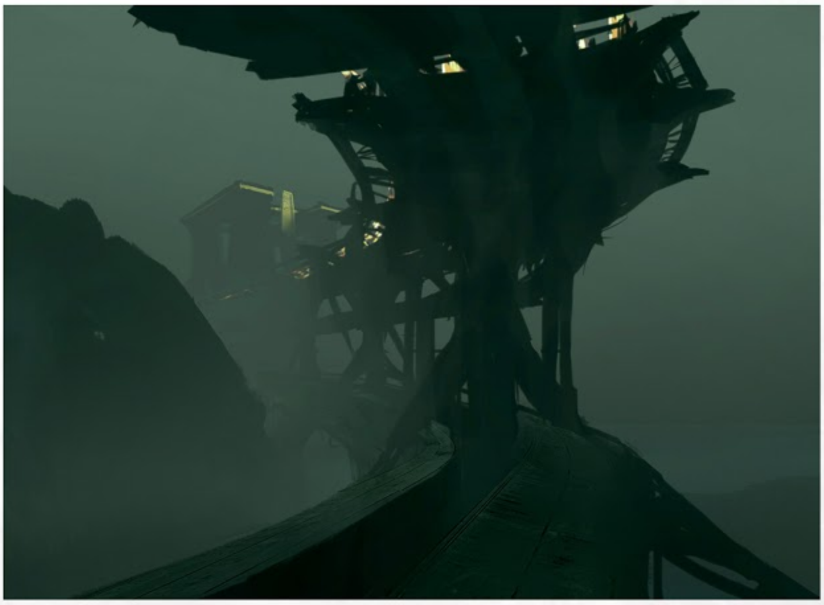
As the story started to take shape for this area, a lot of the visual development material was cut. After sitting down for a bit looking through old sketches, however, the team uncovered some interesting details: they loved the fractal nature of things, and the hard, sheer-cut angles. At this point the team was also ramping up into full production and were stretched thin on the concept side, so they brought in Annis Naeem to help define this area with some fresh eyes.



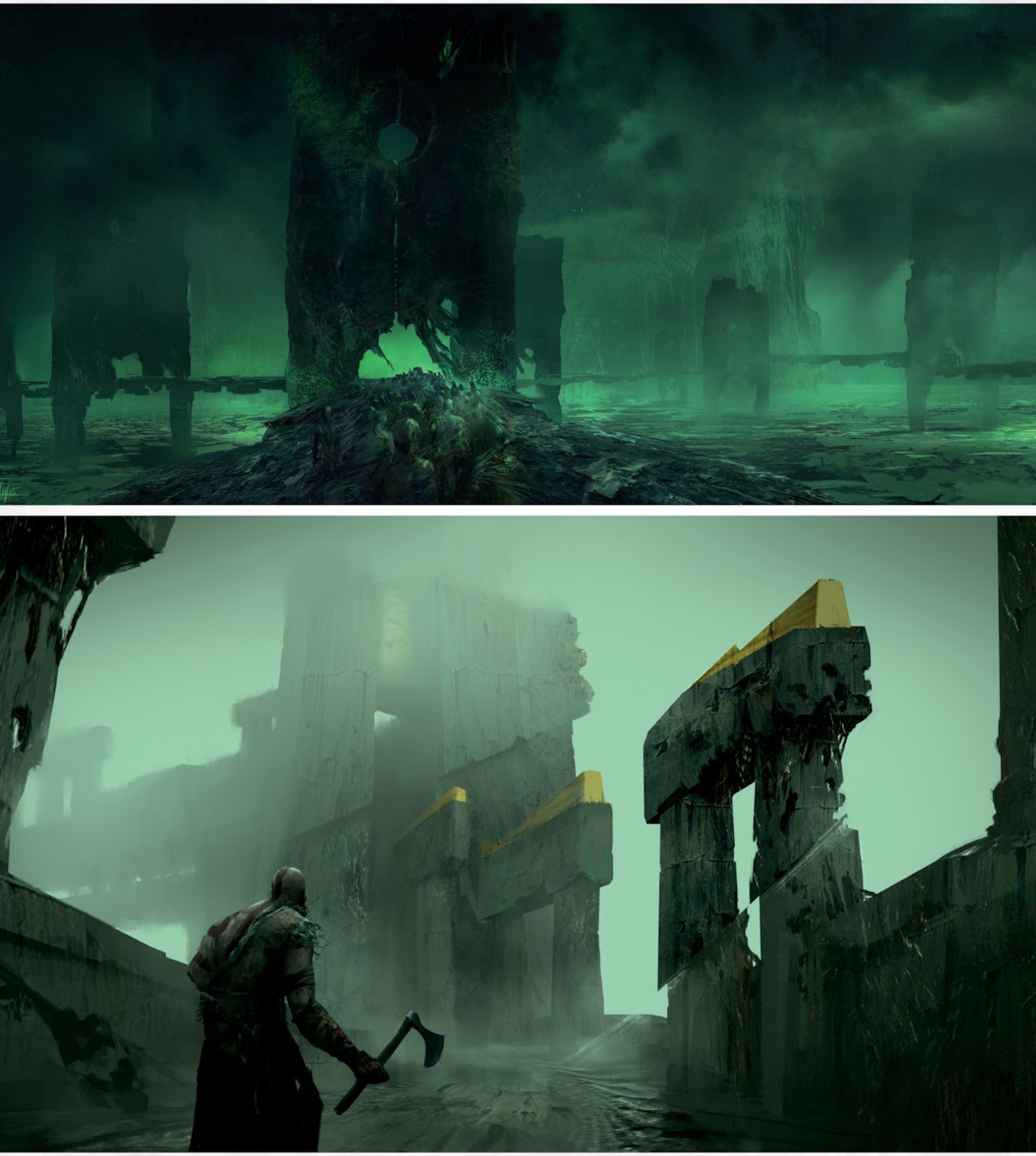




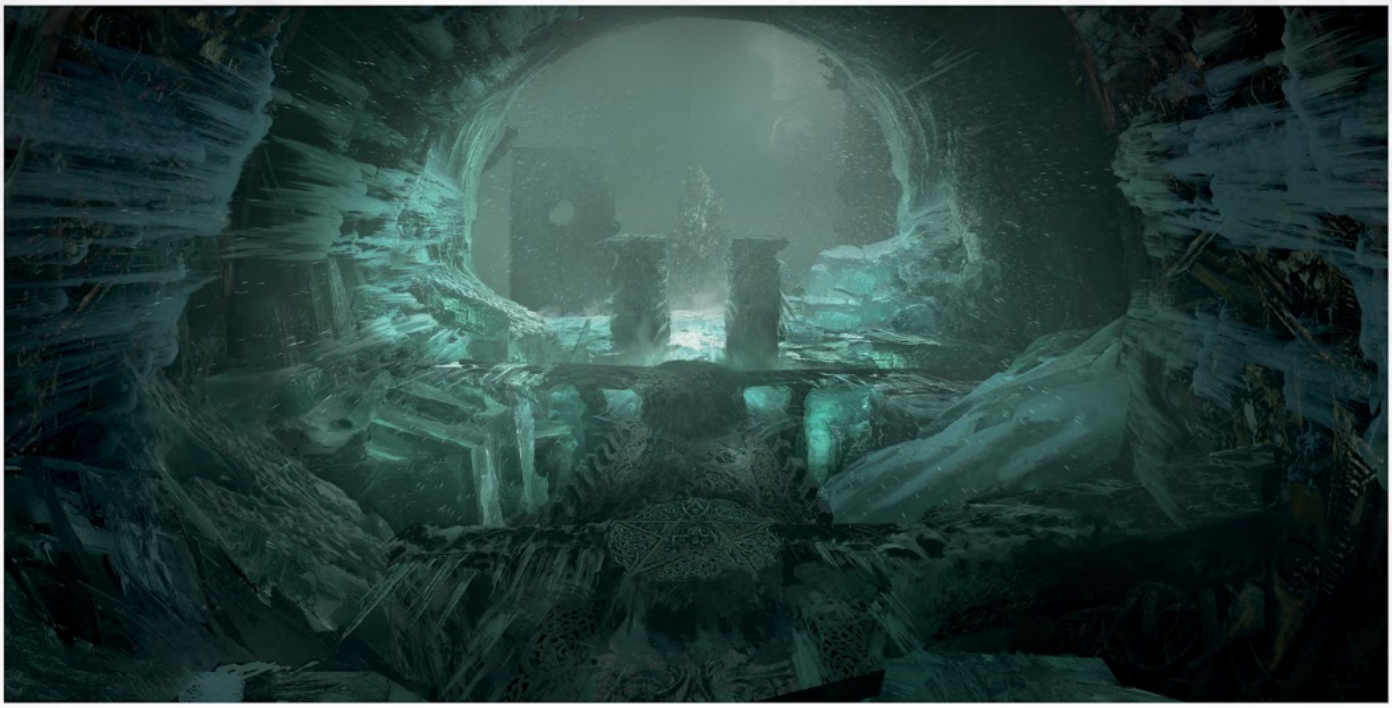


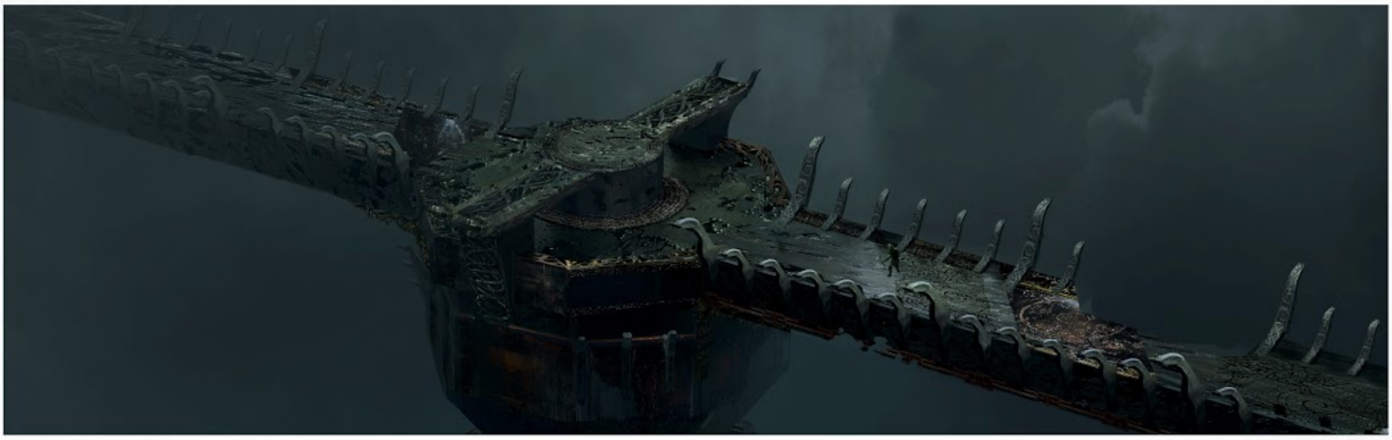


Reinventing Helheim. Artists: Luke Berliner (bottom, right); Annis Naeem

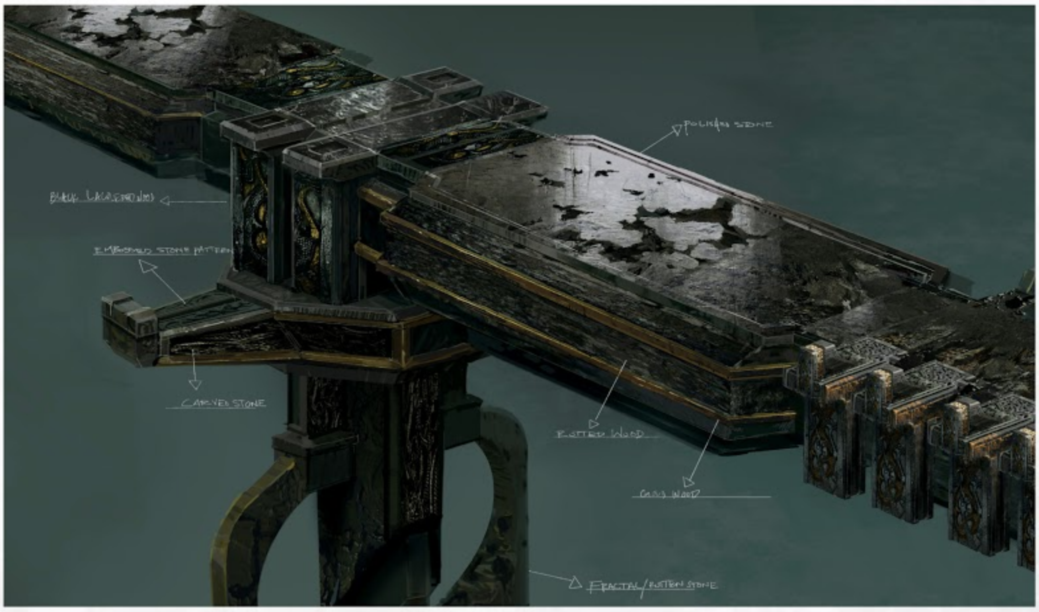


Artists: Annis Naeem, Luke Berliner

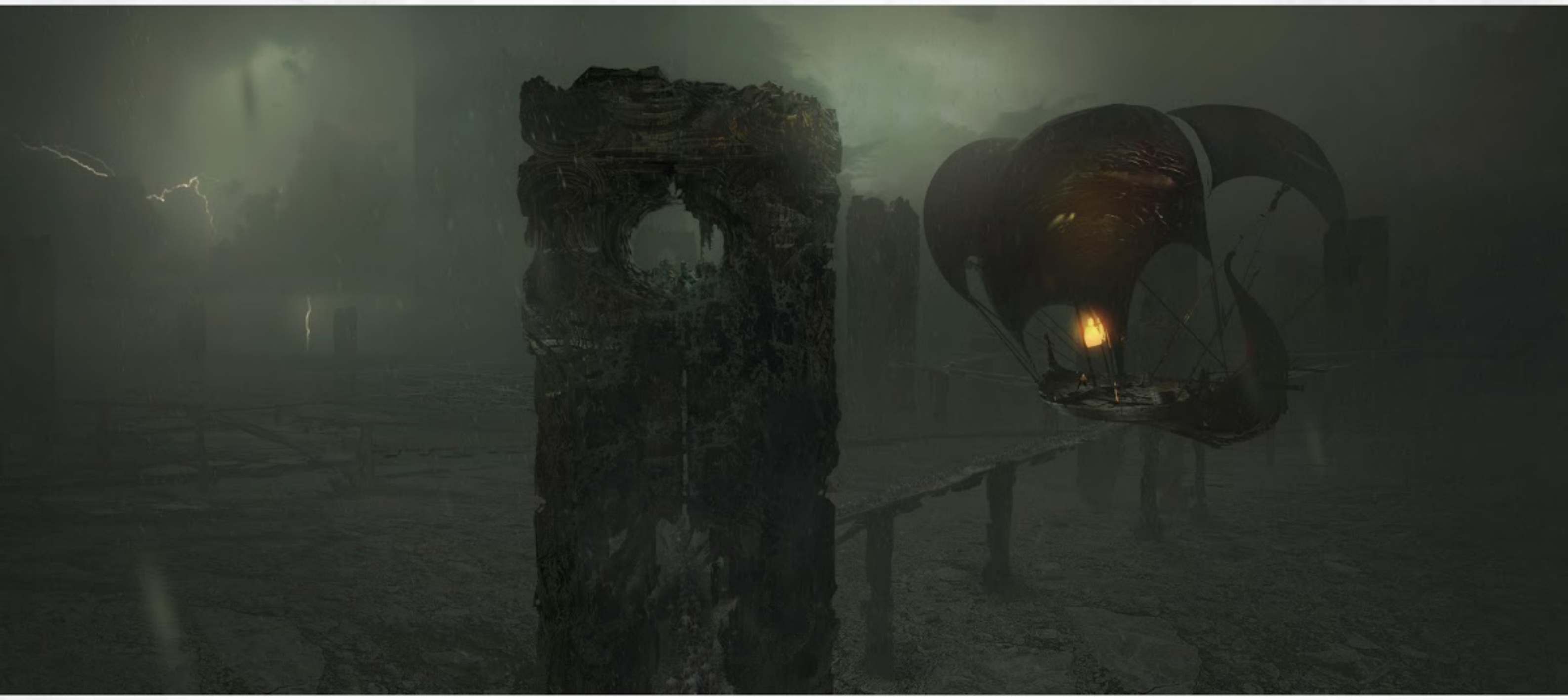


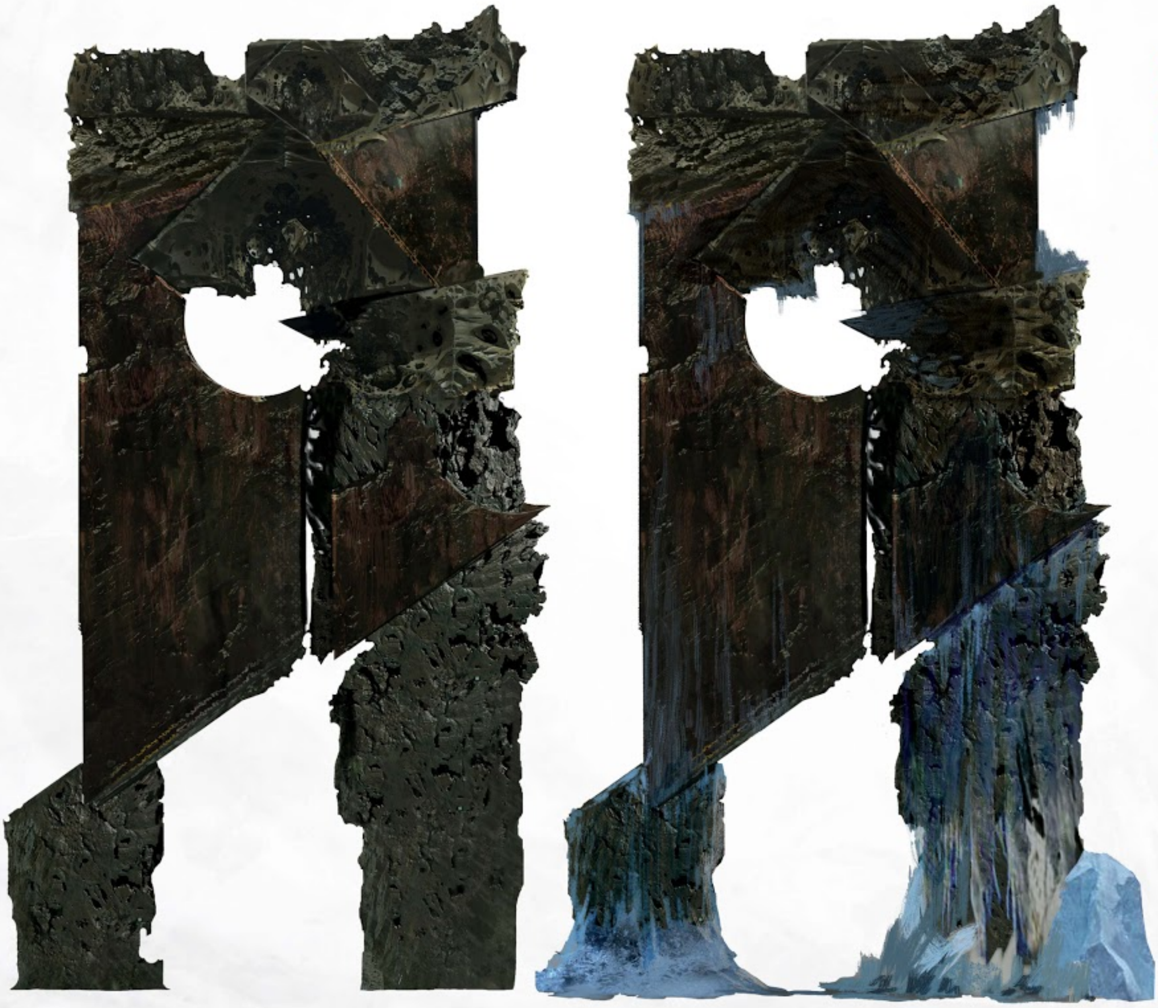


The team continued playing with the golden roof over the Bridge of the Damned, described in the mythology alongside the River of Knives. They imagined these could be serrated glacial flows moving below the bridge, and Annis realized he could employ the monolithic towers that Chris Sutton had loved so much in the beginning of the project.


POLISHED STONE
BLACK LACQUERED WOOD
EMBOSSED STONE PATTERN
CARVED STONE
ROTTEN WOOD
GRAIN WOOD
FRACTAL/ROTTEN STONE

Bridge of the Damned. Artist: Annis Naeem



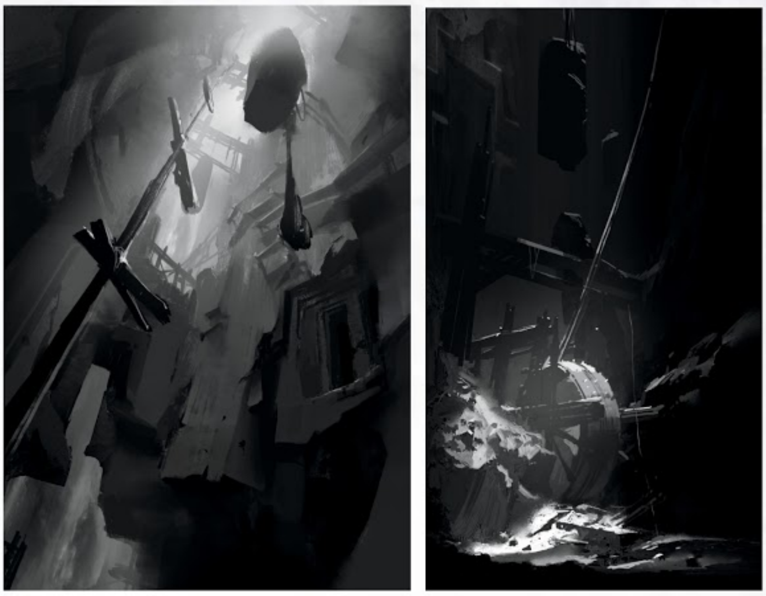


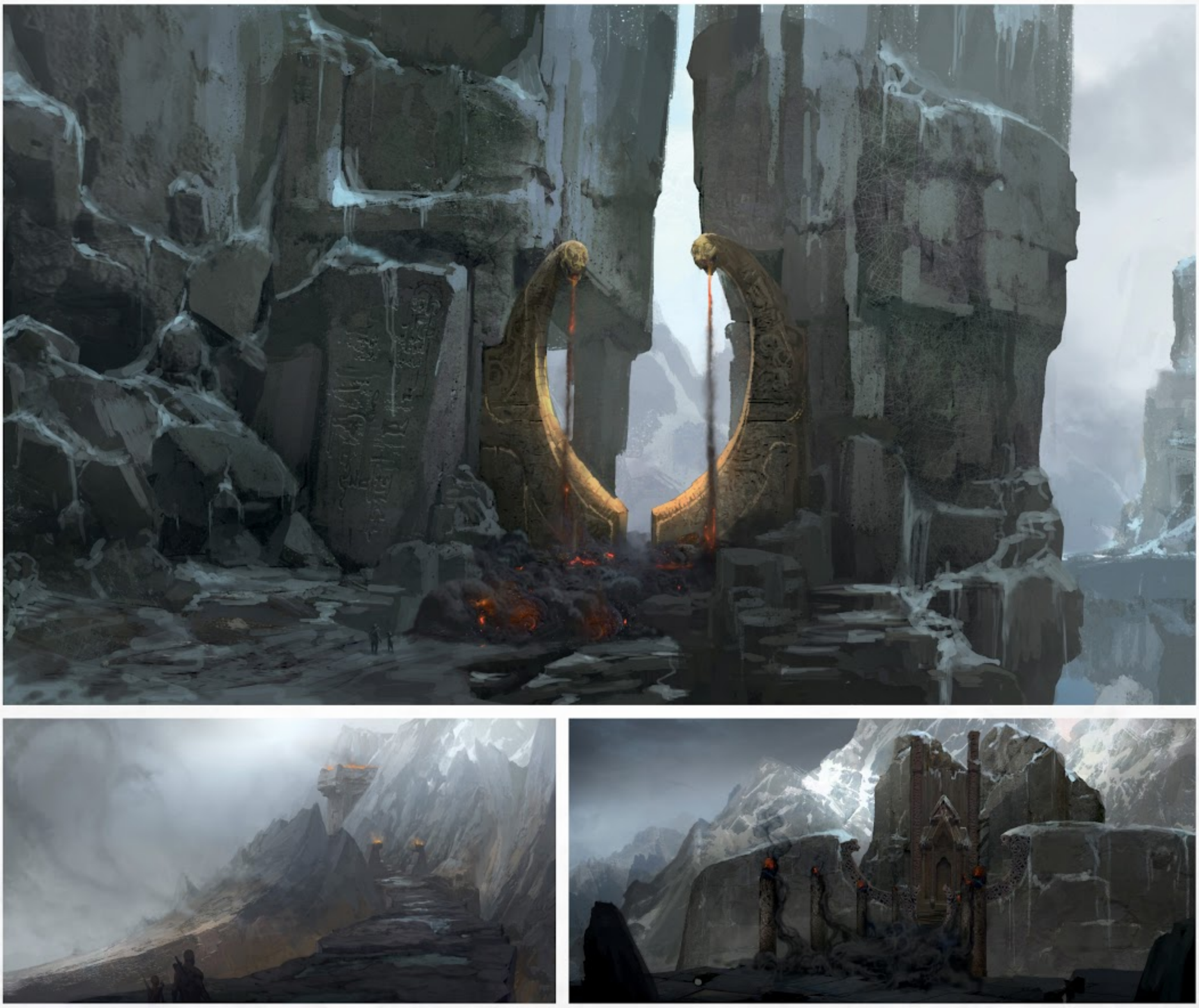
Annis had found reference images of mooring stones with holes carved through them that lined up so one could look down the length of them, and brought this idea to Helheim in the shape of these massive towers. This would give the team an interesting shape to suspend the Bridge of the Damned, and through which the player could fly during their escape.

Artist: Annis Naeem

The Mountain presented an opportunity for the team to leave what they knew of the forest behind, and enter into a realm of wild architecture and old, abandoned hazards. Here we can peek inside the Mountain that the player has been working toward throughout the game for so long. The lore has it that the interior was hollowed out by the giants and built to guard the back door to Jötunheim, which lies at the top of the Mountain.

Creative director Cory Barlog had the idea fairly early on in the game to have a black, impassible smoke safeguarding the entrance to the Mountain. Early on, the team wasn't sure what form this should take; they even talked about smoke that clung to players like hands, and looked more sinister than what ended up in the final game.



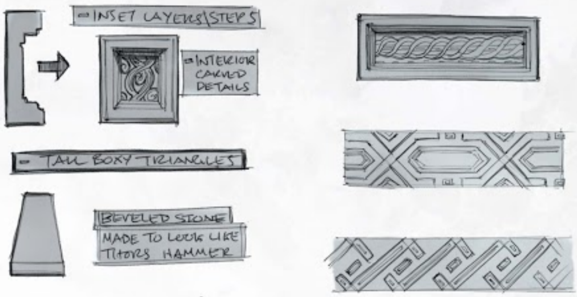


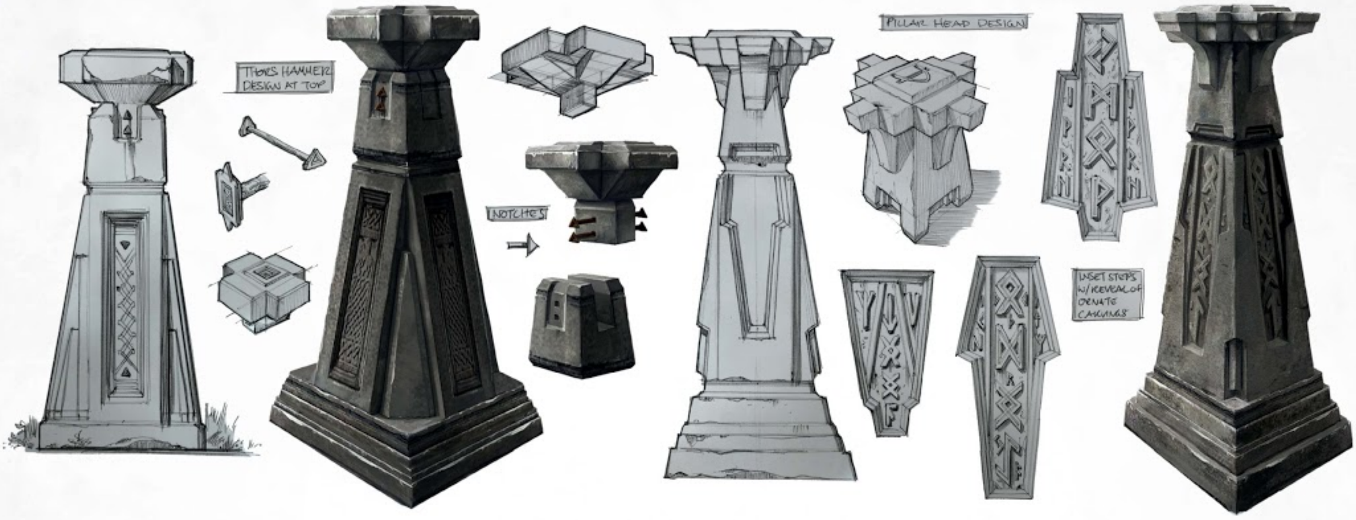
Entering the Mountain. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Vance Kovacs

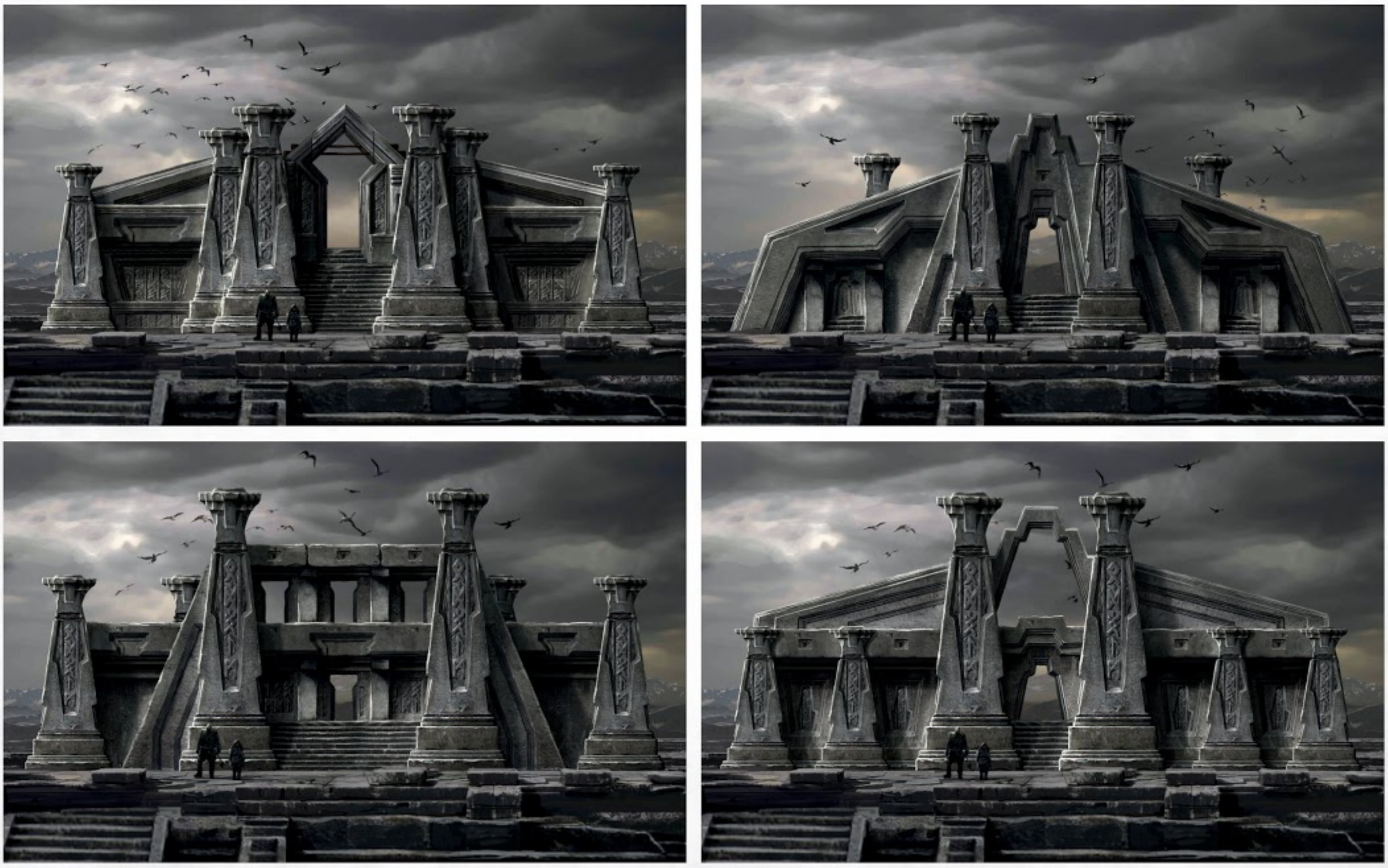
Artist: José Cabrera

Here we see the work of senior concept artist Mark Castanon, as he was trying to find the shapes for the architecture through the Mountain. "Because this was all crafted by the giants, we wanted to show off their skills as master stone craftsmen," said Luke Berliner. "One thing we kept talking about was the scale of the giants. How can we make a level that feels big, but also doesn't make you feel like it's just *Jack and the Beanstalk*?"

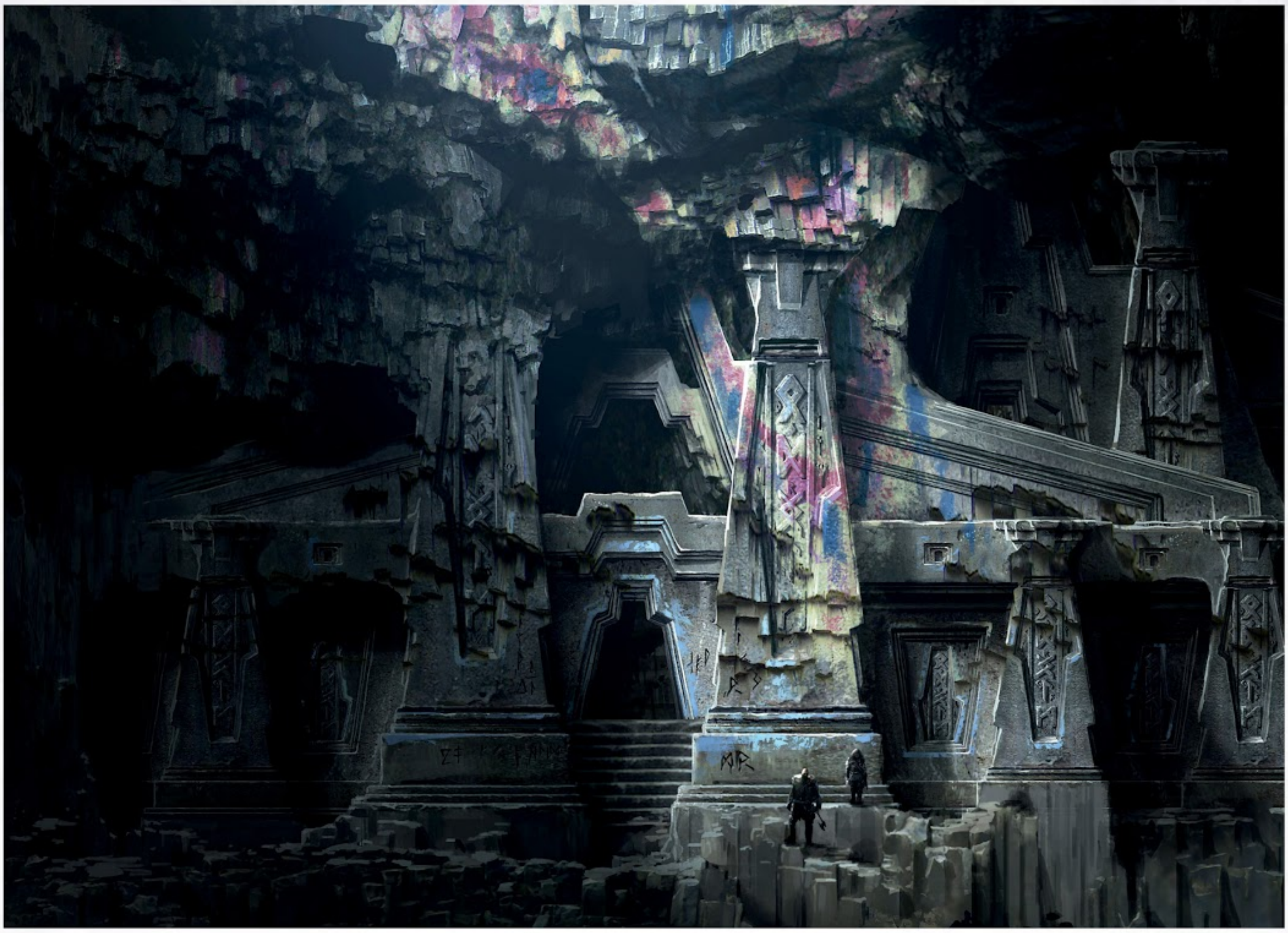
"Chris Sutton kept pointing out that in the mythology, the giants were not all big, and that some were able to change their size. This became the reality of the game as well, as the player encounters dead giants of all sizes and shapes."

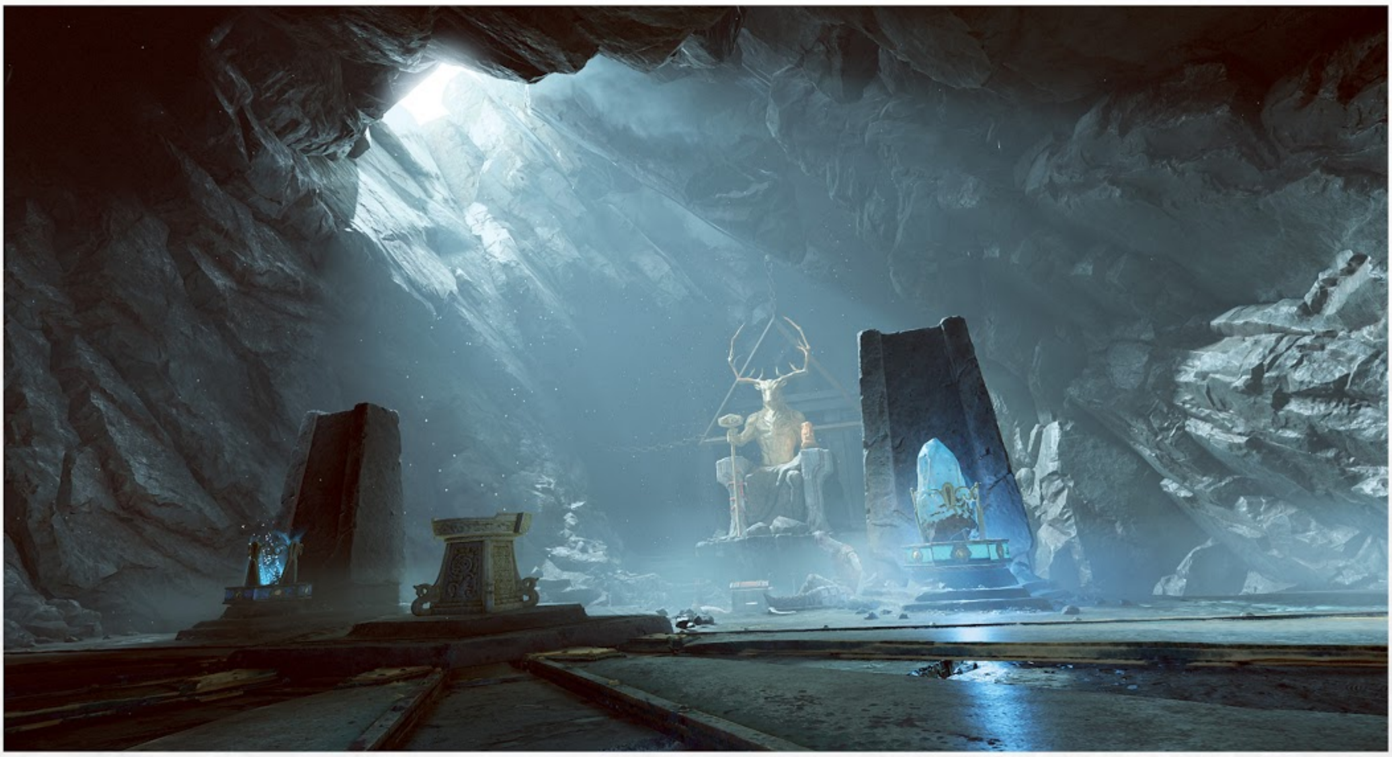

INSET LAYERS/STEPS
INTERIOR CARVED DETAILS
TALL BOXY TRIANGLES
BEVELED STONE MADE TO LOOK LIKE THORS HAMMER


THORS HAMMER DESIGN AT TOP
NOTCHES
PILLAR HEAD DESIGN
INSET STEPS W/ REVEAL OF ORNATE CARVINGS



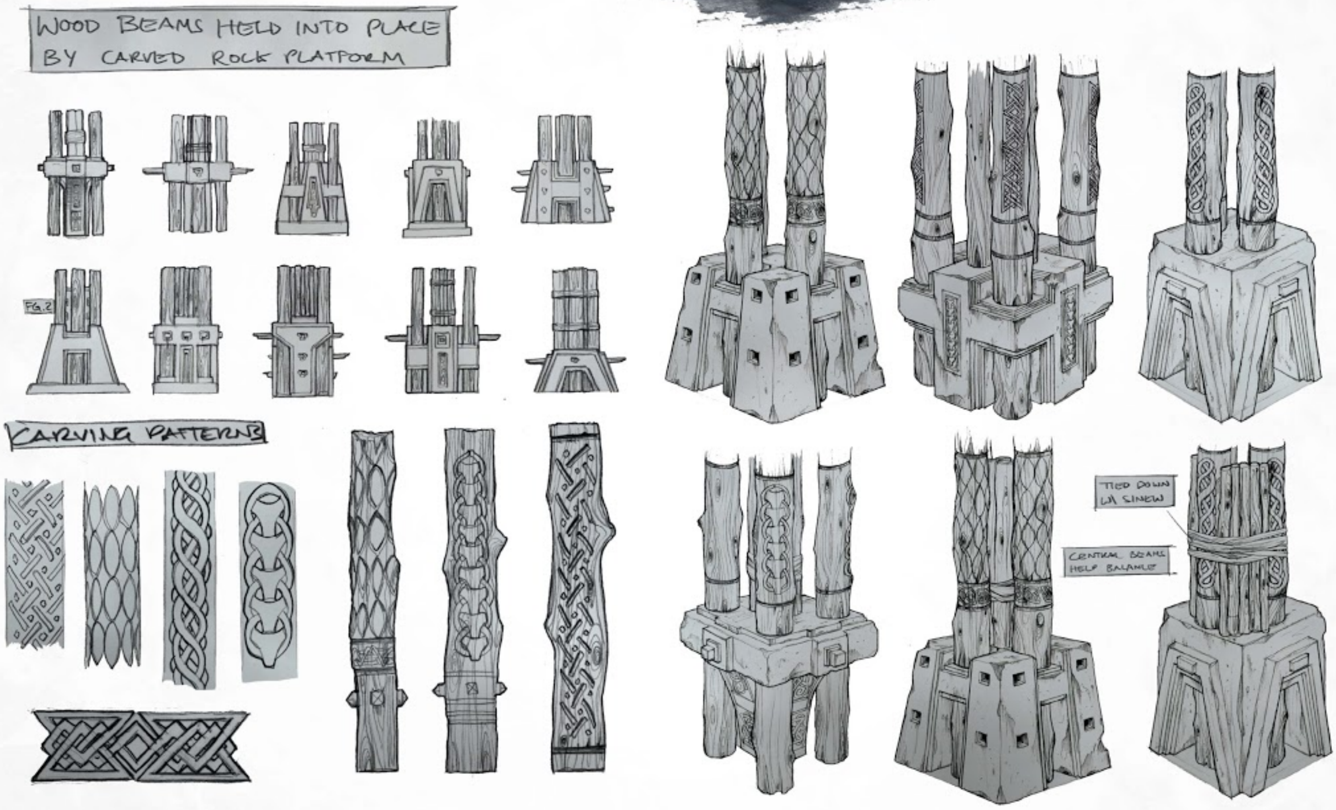
Architecture of the giants. Artist: Mark Castanon

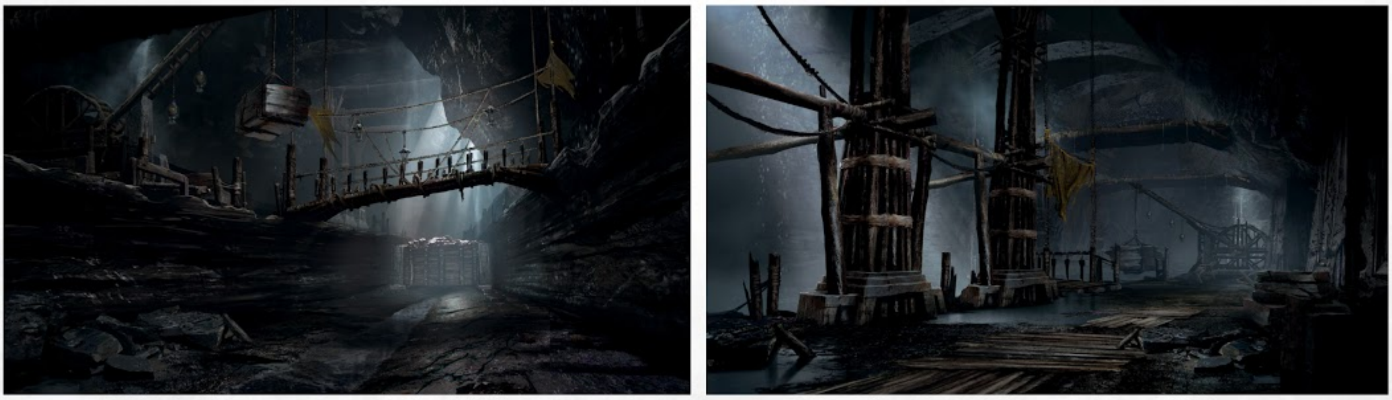




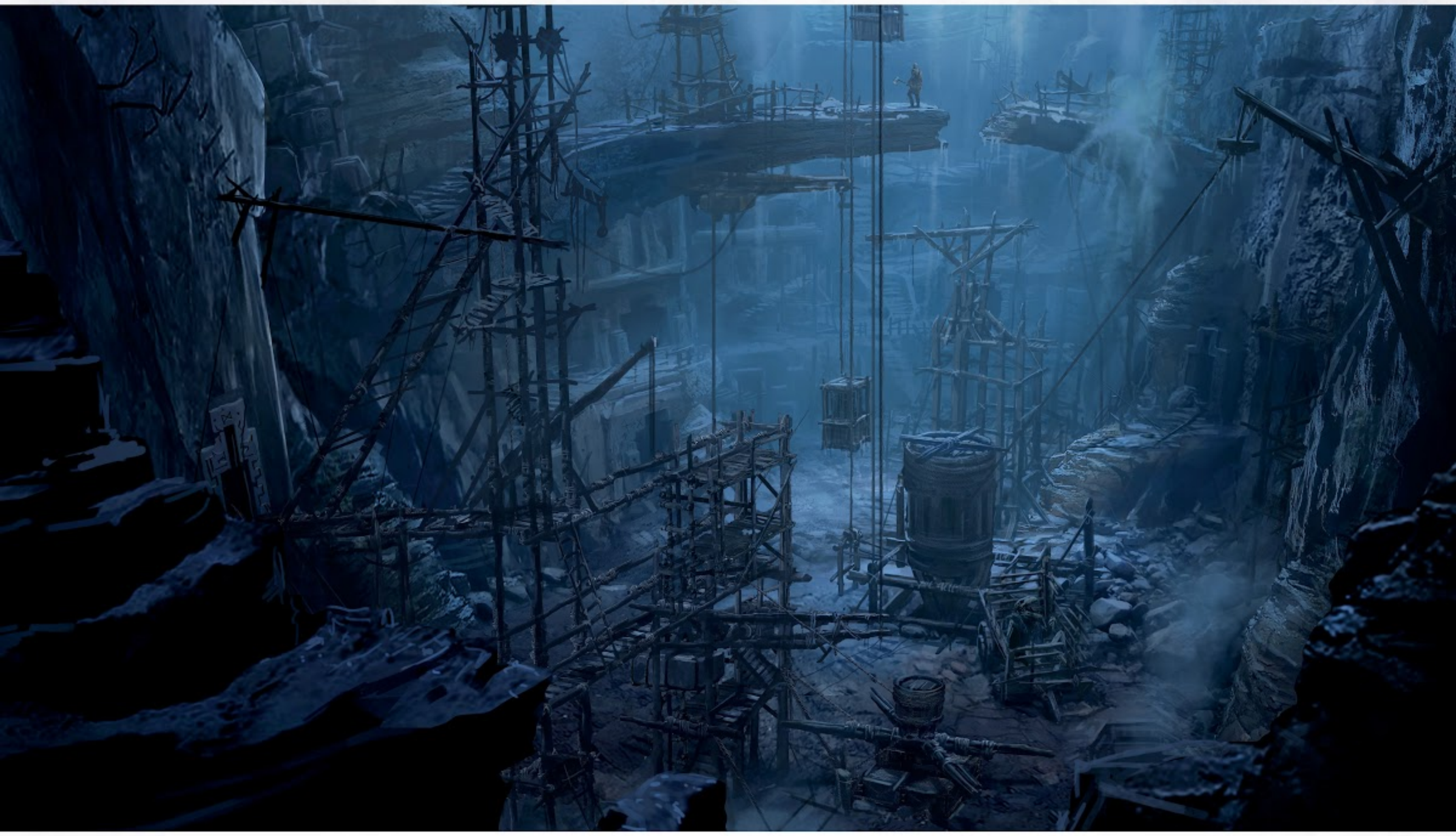
Artists: Mark Castanon (top); Raul Aparicio, Mariusz Wiechec, Paul Coda (bottom)

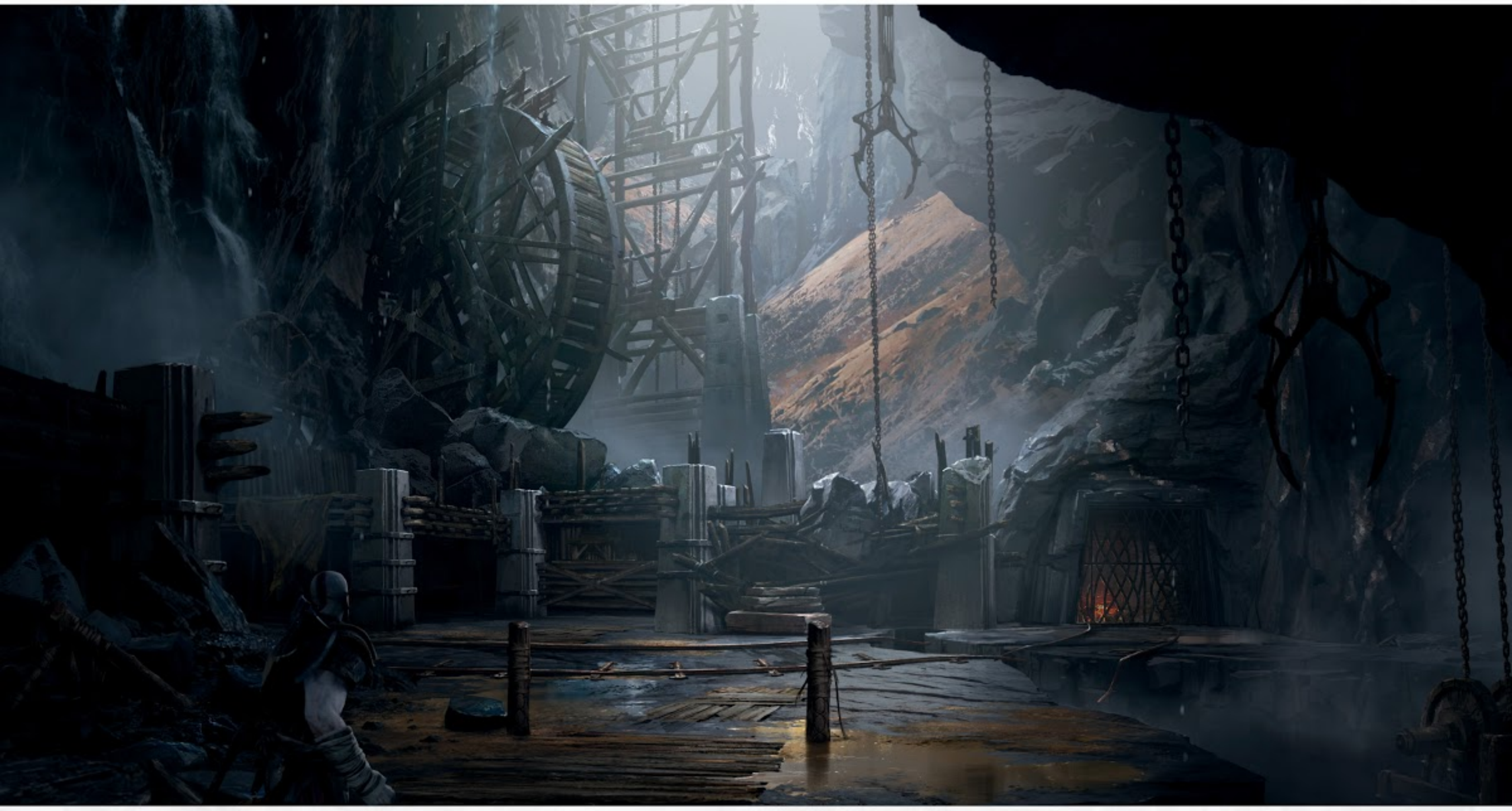
The lower section of the Mountain was more of a mine with old abandoned signs of industry throughout the area. On the opposite page we also see the corpses of the many dead warriors and those seeking unsuccessfully to summit the Mountain, which extend all the way up its face.


WOOD BEAMS HELD INTO PLACE BY CARVED ROCK PLATFORM
FG. 2
CARVING PATTERNS
TIED DOWN W/ SINEW
CENTRAL BEAMS HELP BALANCE



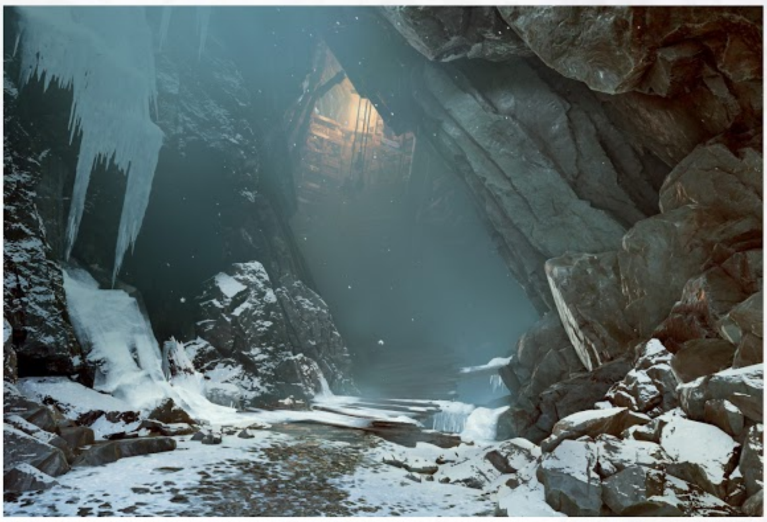
Base of the chimney. Artist: Mark Castanon

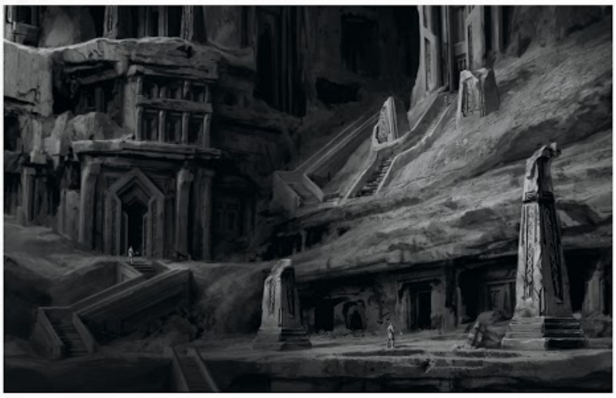


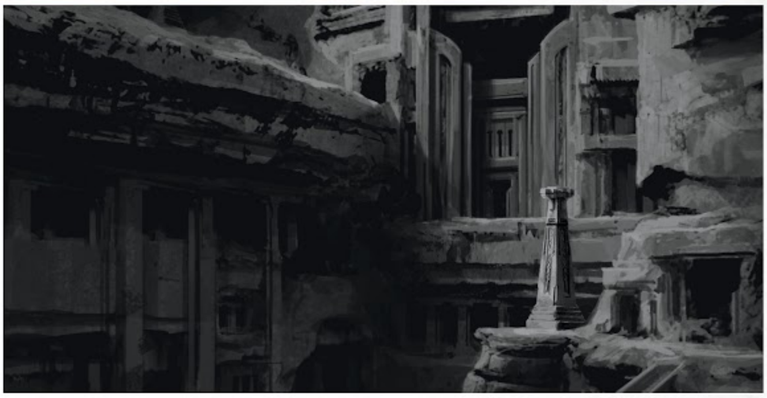


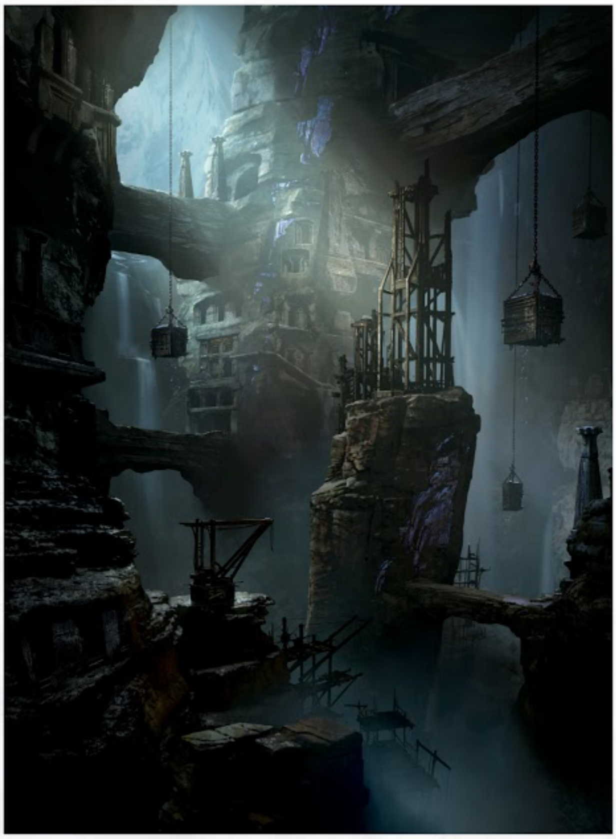
Artists: MOOD (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)

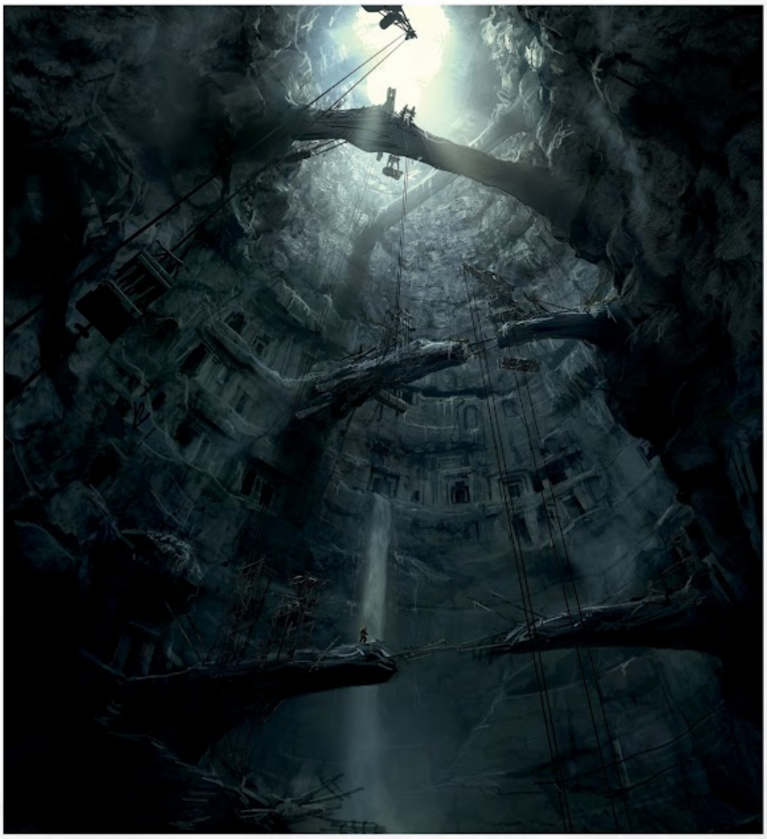
“Like other architectural areas of Midgard itself, the inspiration for the architecture in the Mountain came from various ancient locations where dwellings were entirely carved out of cliff faces or giant rocks. In this idea, you could hopefully get some fantastic organic architectural areas blending into the greater rock that had moments of refinement and culture. Since the Mountain was essentially a giant mine, we wanted to couple that with ancient mining technology that had strong structural integrity but also felt old and distressed. Our goal was to hopefully create a space that felt like the giants had a substantial footprint here, and that at one point in time was very alive and industrial, while also looking like time had passed and environmental effects had taken their toll,” said Mark Castanon.











Middle chimney explorations. Artists: Melissa Smith, Paul Coda, Raul Aparicio (top); Mark Castanon (middle, bottom left, opposite); MOOD (bottom right)

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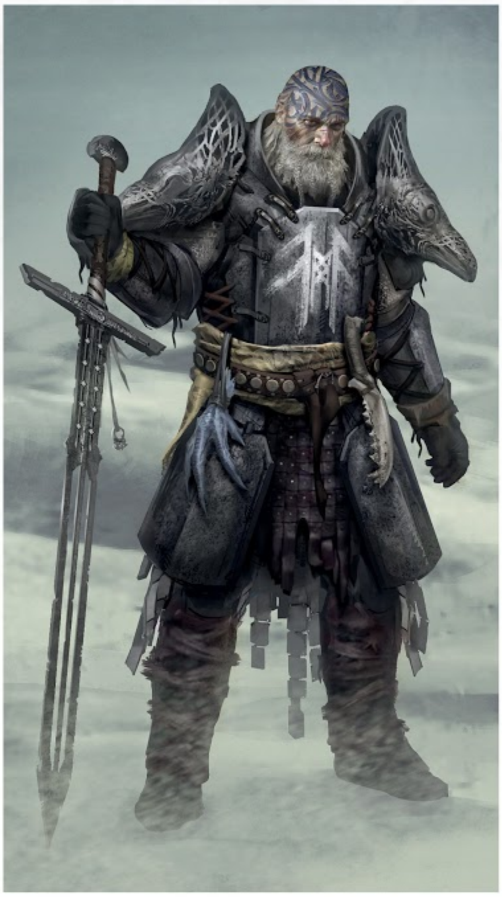
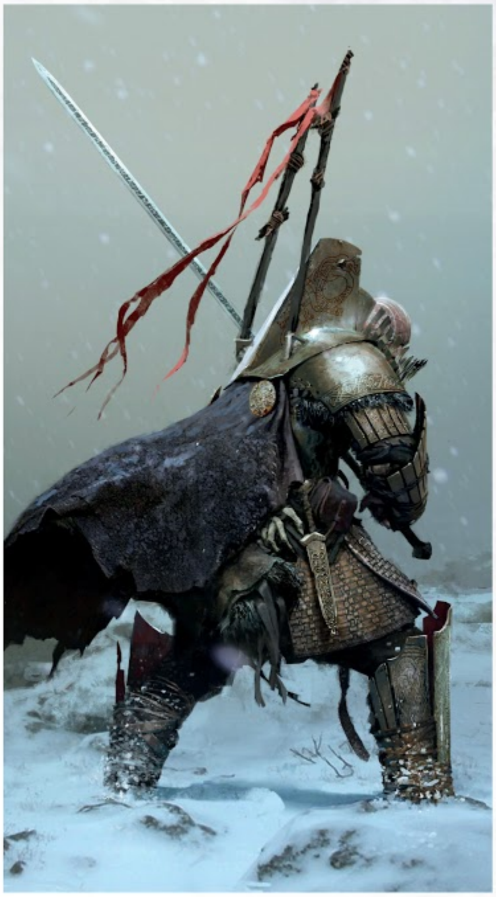
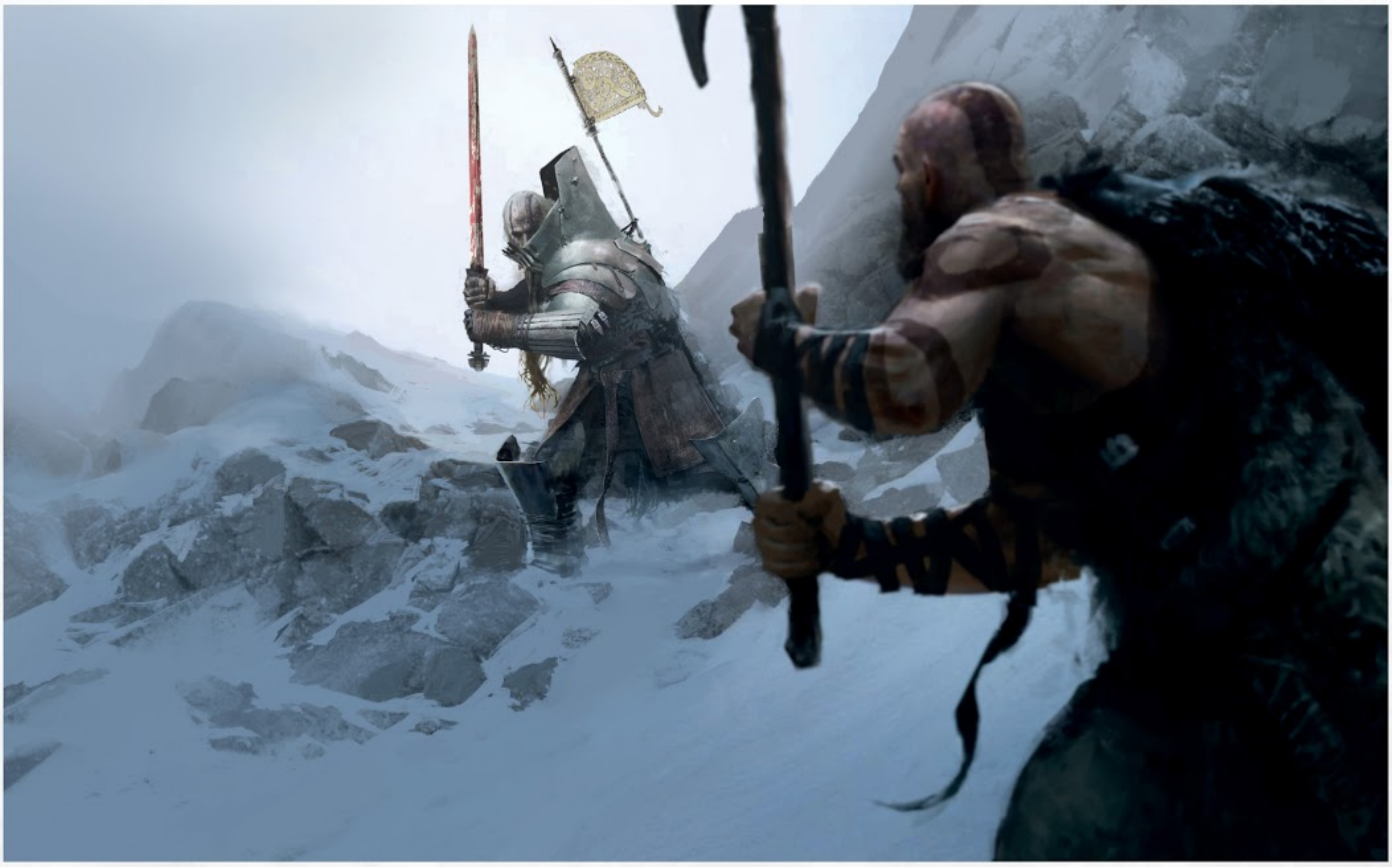
The Travelers are the strongest non-mythical enemies the player encounters. These powerful warriors travel the land gaining both physical and magical knowledge to aid them in combat.

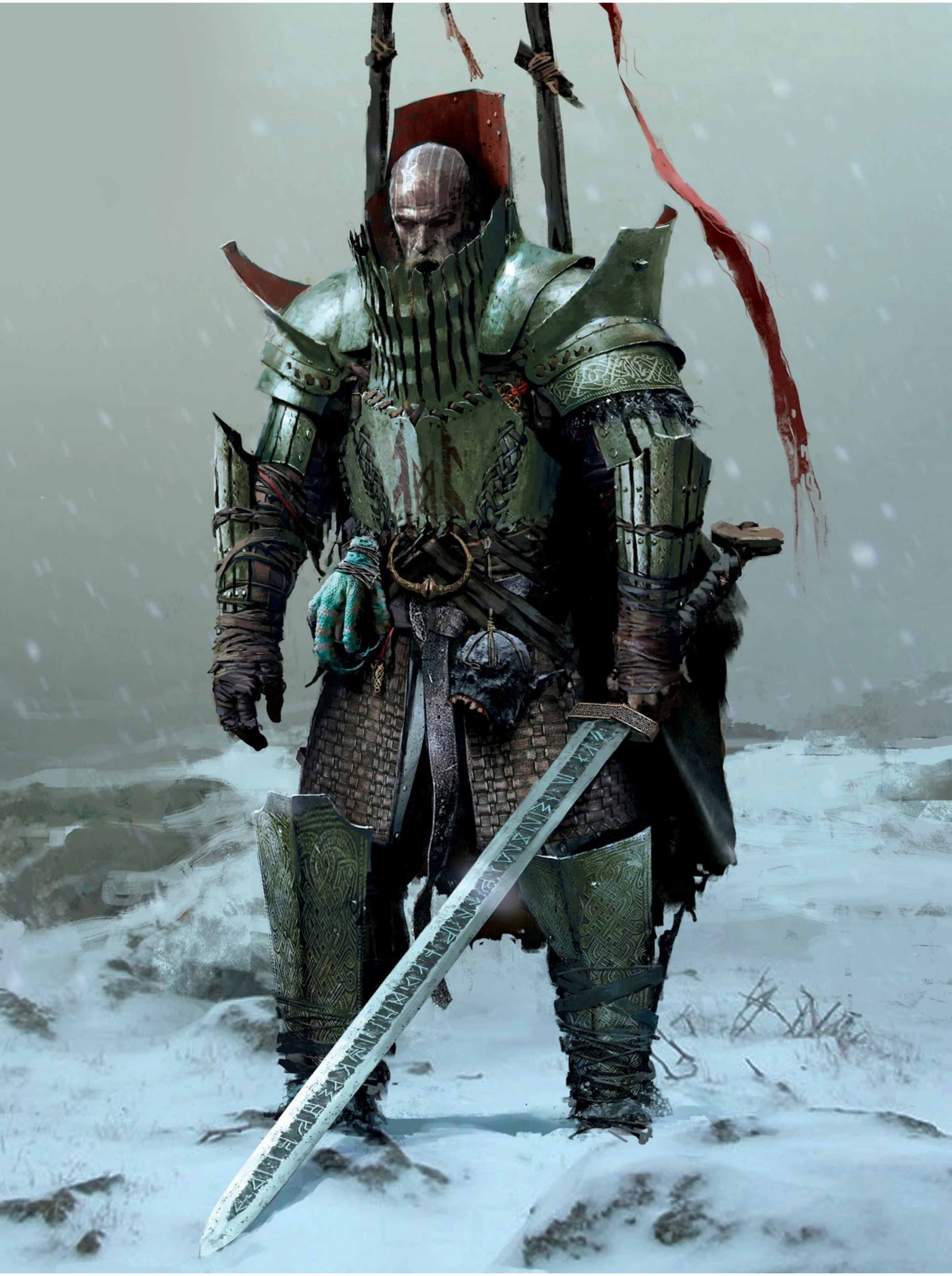
The Travelers were designed to be tank-like. With that in mind, José designed them using small metal pieces which are held together with interwoven leather straps to create the massive armor they wear and give it a unique Norse feel. Only when their armor has been knocked off are they vulnerable.

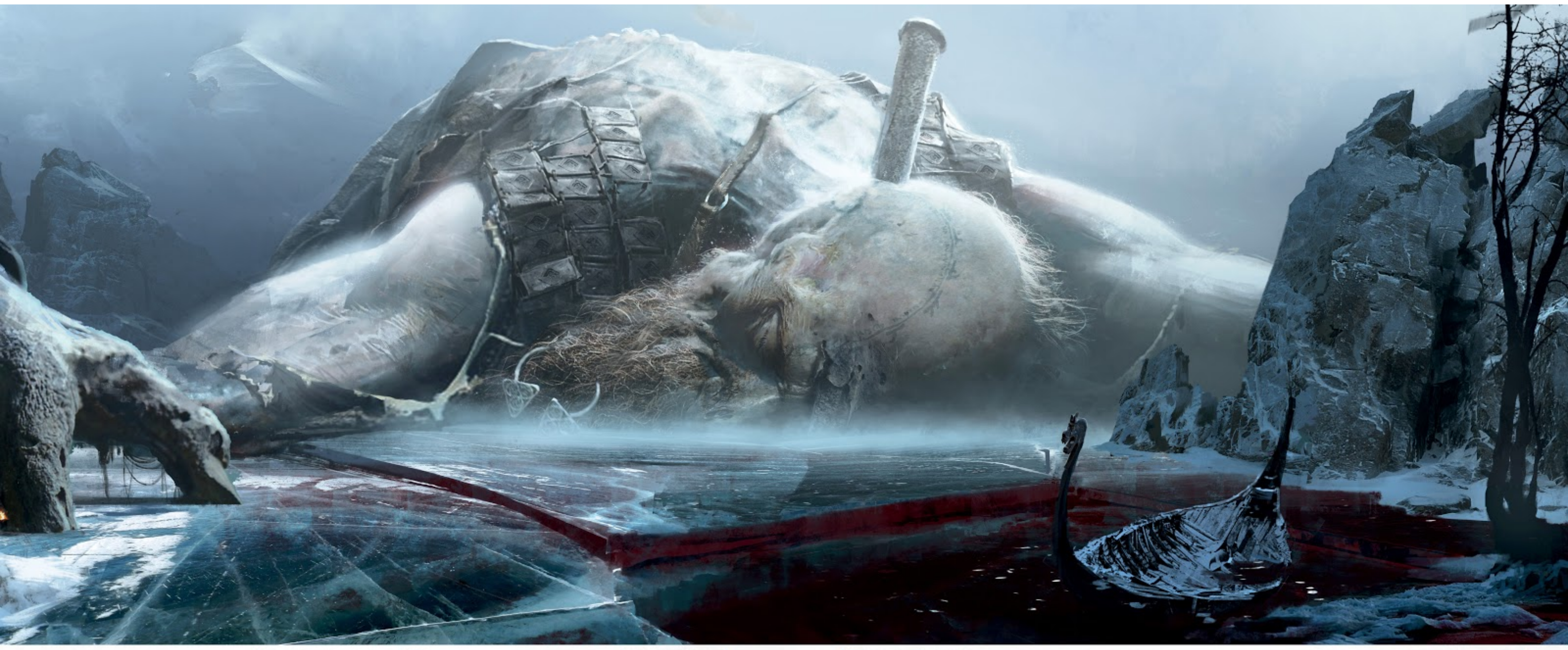






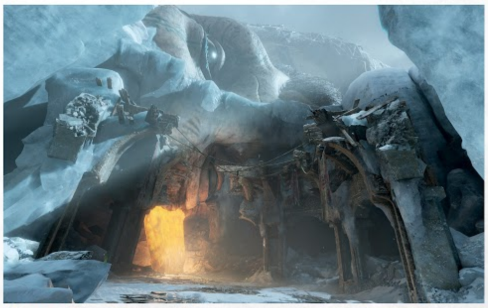
Traveler explorations. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top left); José Cabrera (top right, bottom, opposite)



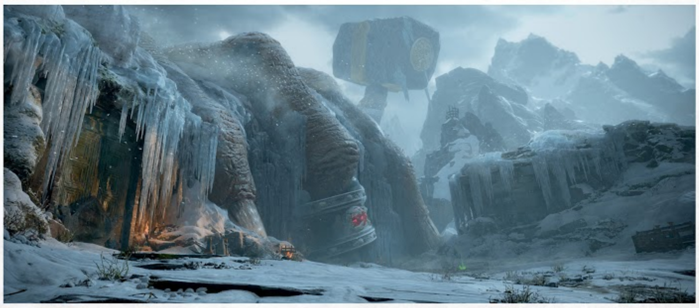


Early on in the project, MOOD had created a painting of a fallen giant, with the landscape having grown up around its body. The team quickly grew attached to the idea of this gargantuan corpse, going so far as to attempt placing it into the vista of the first playable demo. Creative director Cory Barlog developed the story of this giant Stone Mason, Thamur, and his attempts to raise stone fortifications protecting Jötunheim from Thor prior to the giant's demise.

This level in the game was nicknamed "Stone Mason," and its lore stated that when Thor killed Thamur, the giant fell into a village and its adjacent lake. With his last breath, Thamur froze the surrounding area, locking the tip of his chisel deep into the ice.



The Stone Mason. Artists: José Cabrera (top); Lucas Sparks, Brandon Cha (bottom)



Artists: Lucas Sparks, Isabelle Lemay, Brandon Cha (bottom)

Artist: José Cabrera

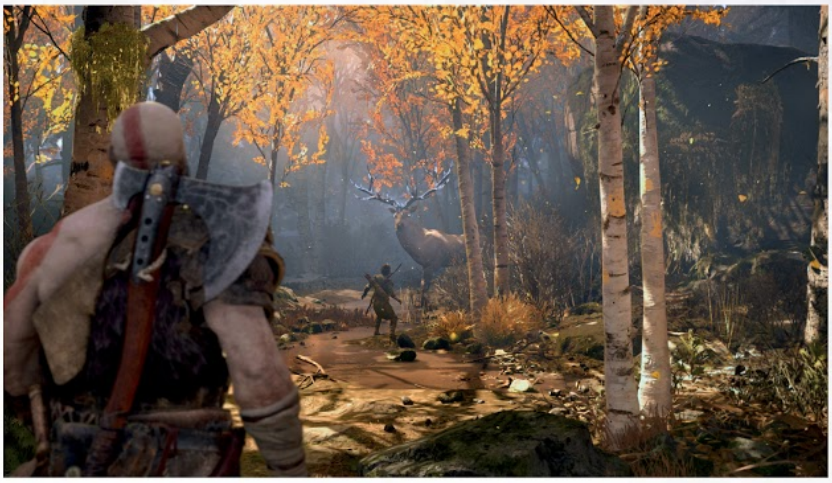
IV

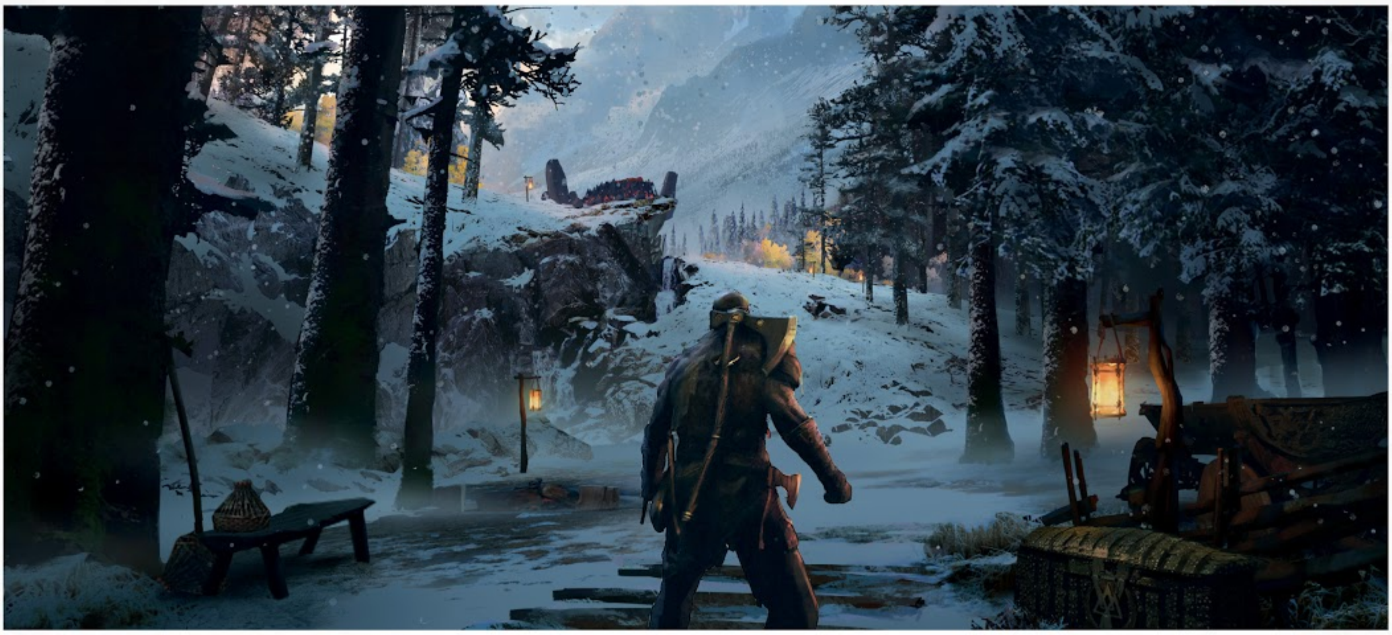
PRODUCTION

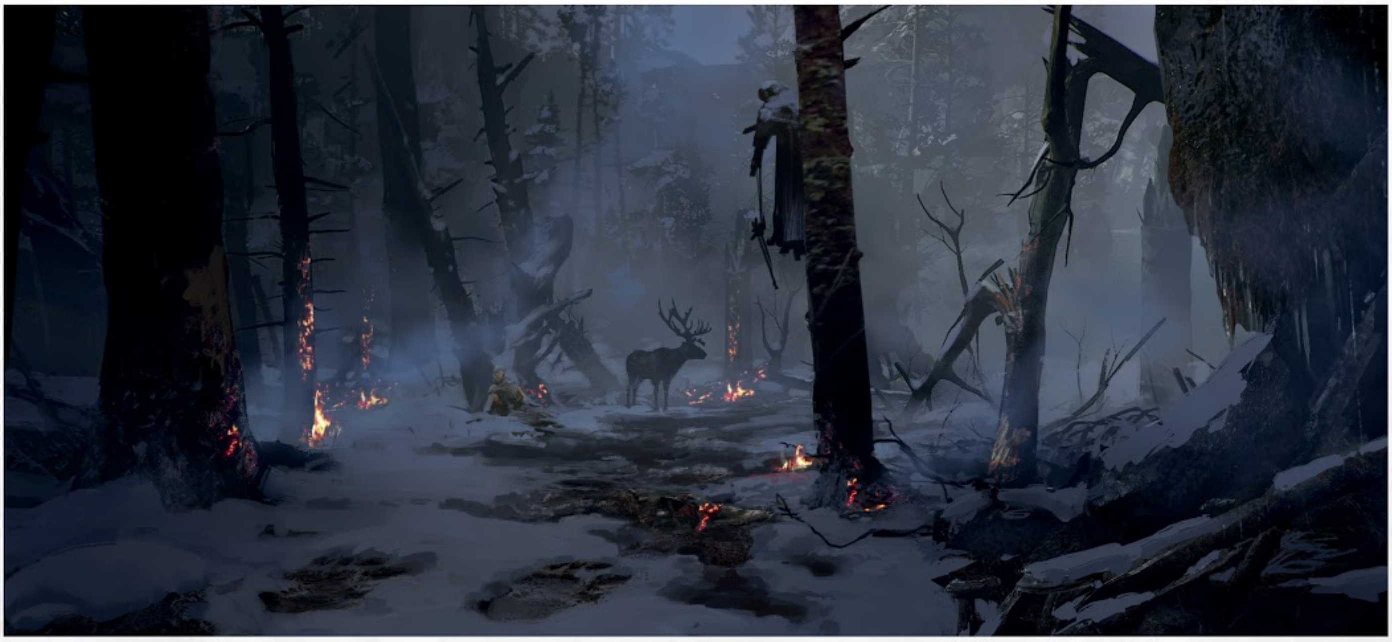
As *God of War* entered the full swing of production, the long, sustained work of actually making the game began. At this point, the design department had blocked out all of the areas and enemies, and the art department could bring the levels to life. As with all game development, it was an exciting time during which the developers were able to sink their teeth into more specific details, but it also brought with it new challenges: to solve problems rather than to create them, and to work within the constraints of the design so that the game functions properly. This was a time of frank conversations, long hours, and bargaining with designers, artists, and production to fully understand what everyone wanted to achieve. This was the phase for which everyone on the team had prepared, and the excitement was palpable.

There's a particular magic that happens during this period of production, watching as what were once merely designs on paper begin to become real, playable code. For an artist to complete a painting, and then to pick up a controller and walk through the space they've created, or to fight the enemies they've designed, is something special indeed. For a production as large and sprawling as this one, finally starting to see all the effort that multiple creators across many departments have put into the project truly becomes something to behold.

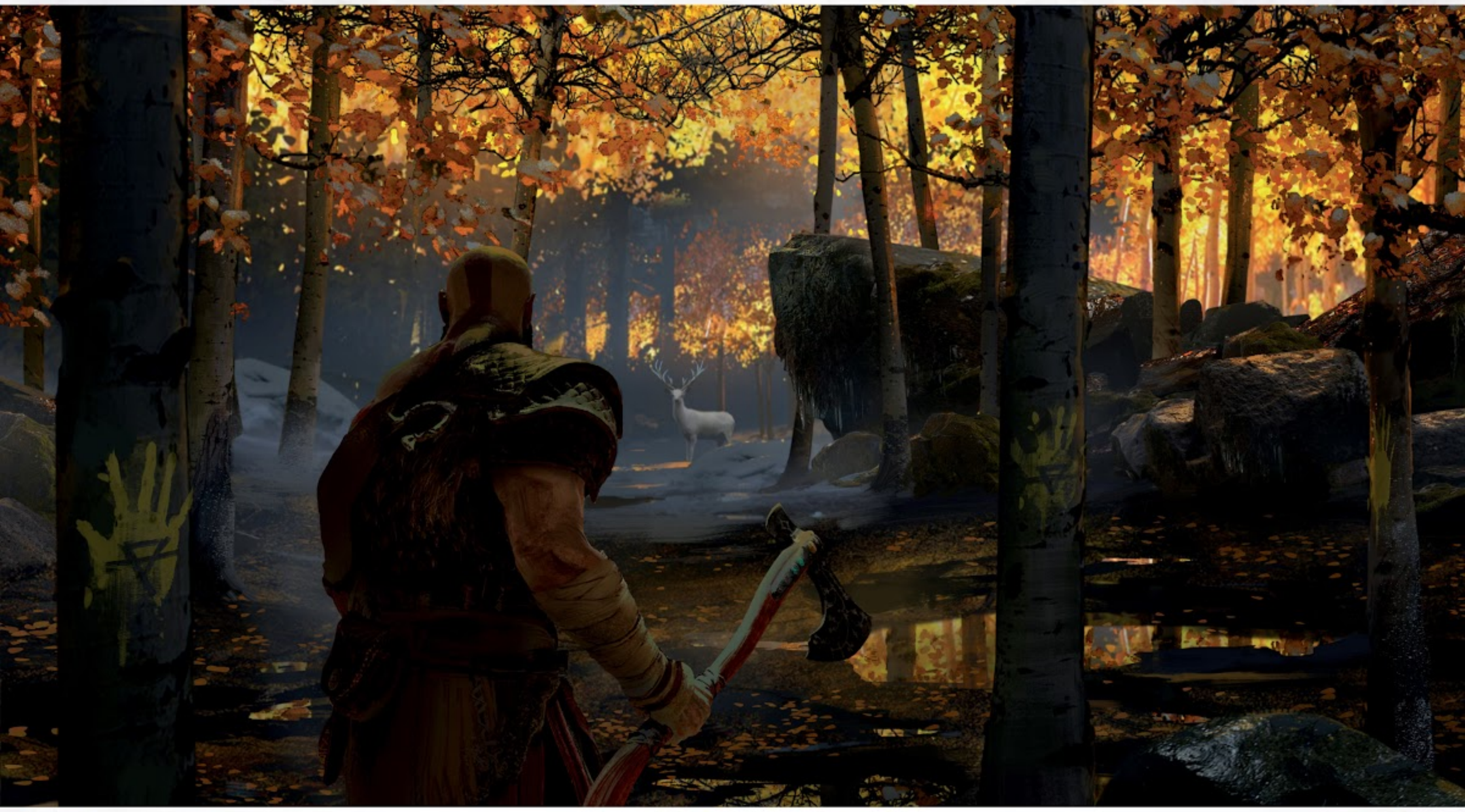
For *God of War*'s first E3 appearance, the team needed to come up with a global art direction style guide in order to exhibit a high level of consistency for the game's first public showing. After many meetings and lots of iteration, the team landed on its own version of mythical realism, which consisted of Norse fantasy, historical detail, and pre-digital color. Once these elements were folded together, things started to lock in and the world started to soften. Where before the game world had felt extremely dark, somewhat like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the elements of wonder now started to come through as the player started to see the world through Atreus' eyes.

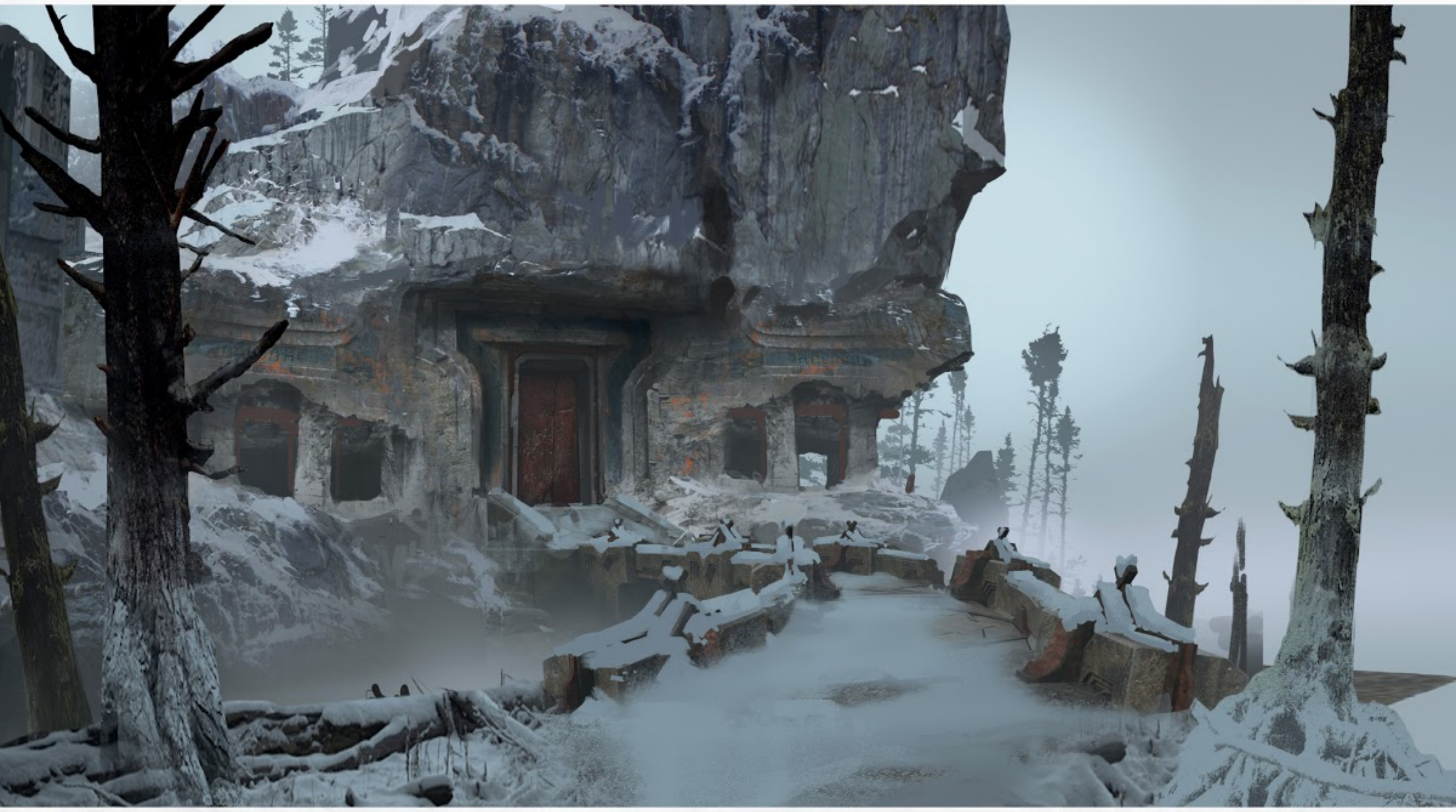




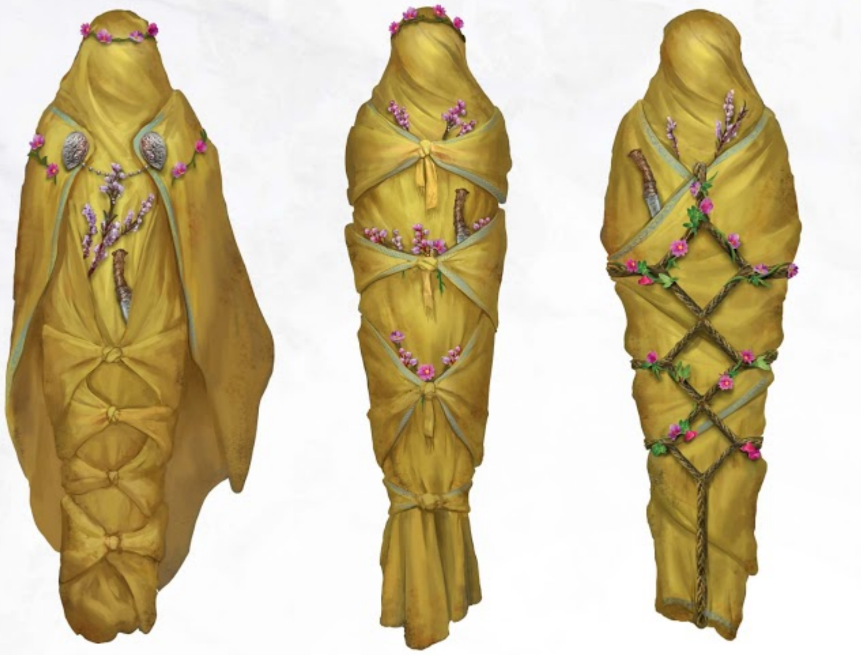


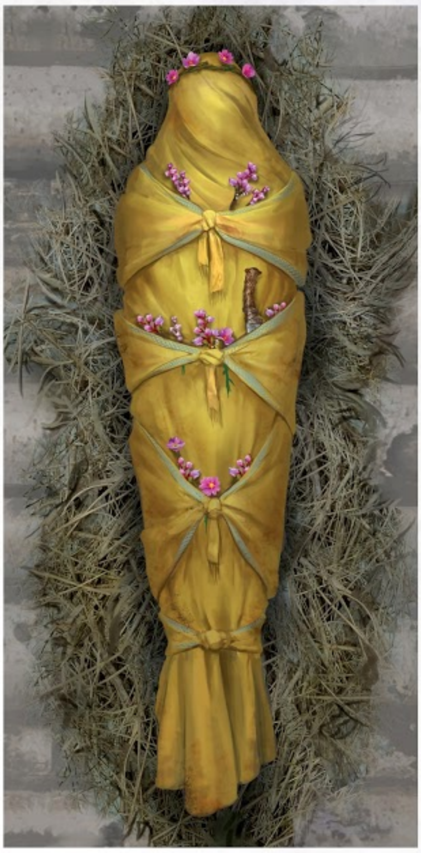
Close to home. Artists: Dan McKim, Nate Stephens (top); Luke Berliner



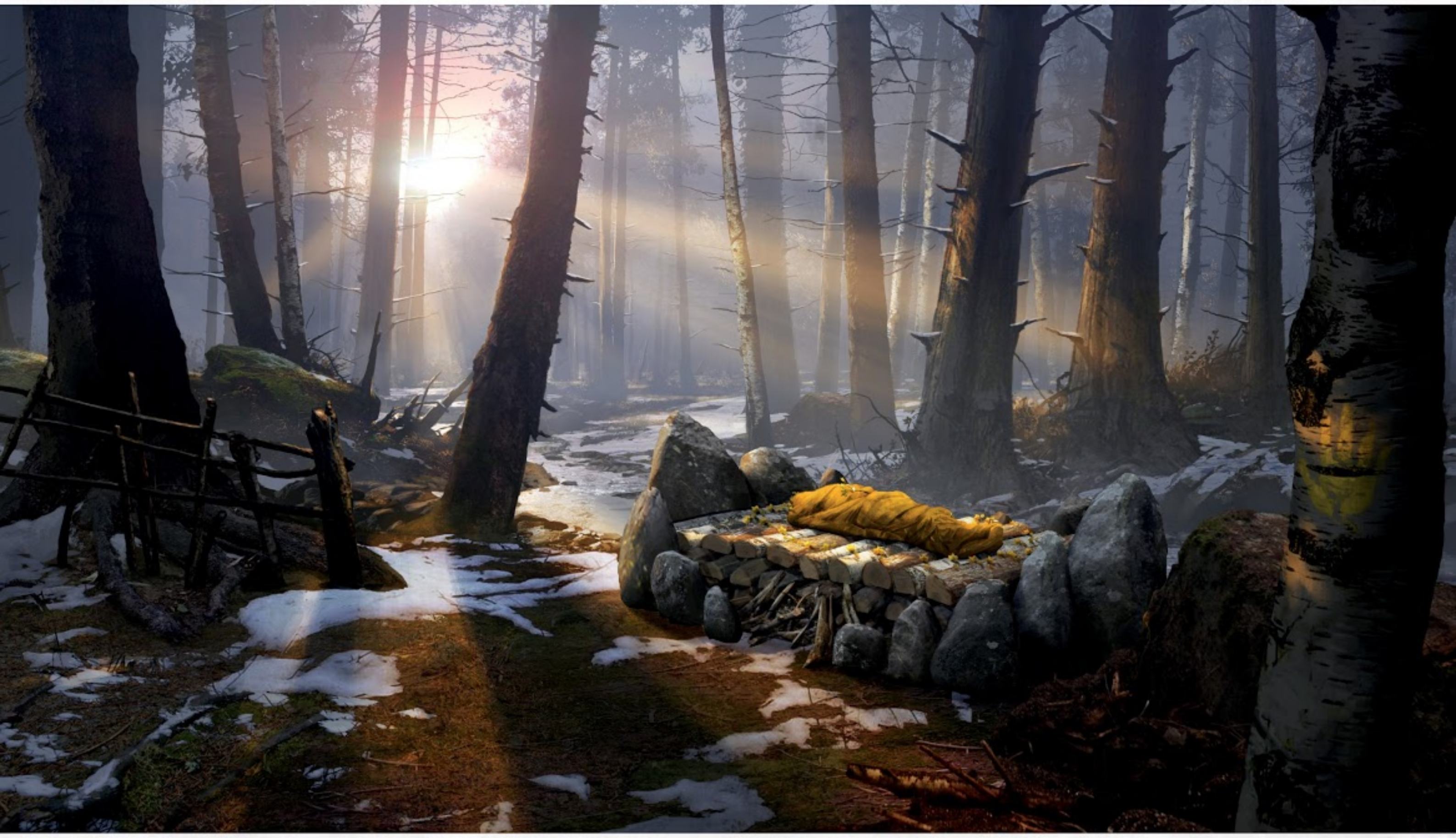


Artist: Luke Berliner





The team knew that yellow would be the dominant color for the mother's body wrapping. "We researched flora local to Scandinavia, and selected the complementary purple flowers that are placed between the folds of the wrapping," said concept artist Yefim Kligerman. "We wanted to keep the fabric mostly loose to preserve the mother's femininity, and to not give too many hints as to her appearance." In some of the design sketches we see traditional Norse brooches, as well as runic symbols in the rope work, but the team finally settled on something simpler, and added a wreath of flowers as the final touch.



The funeral pyre. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)

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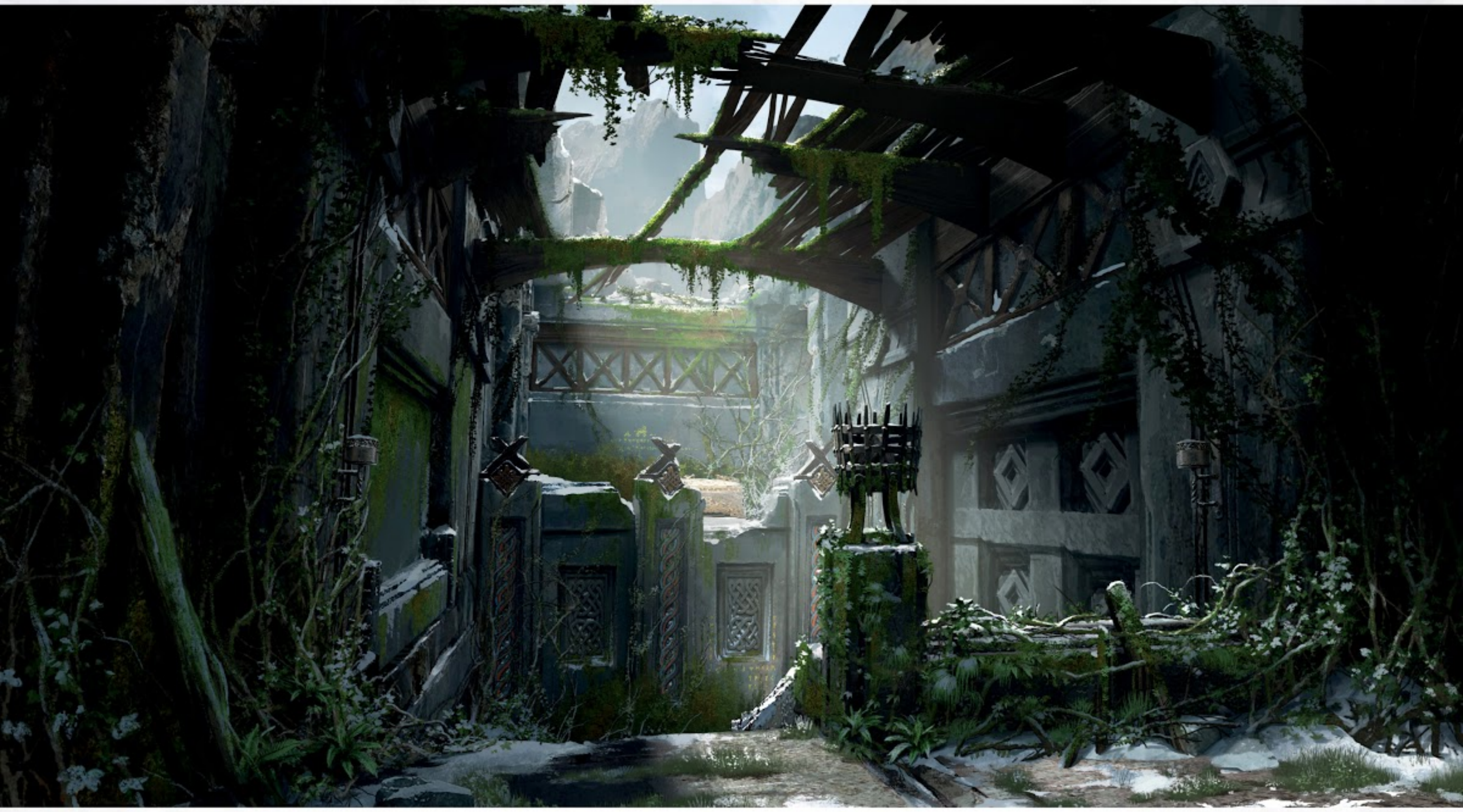
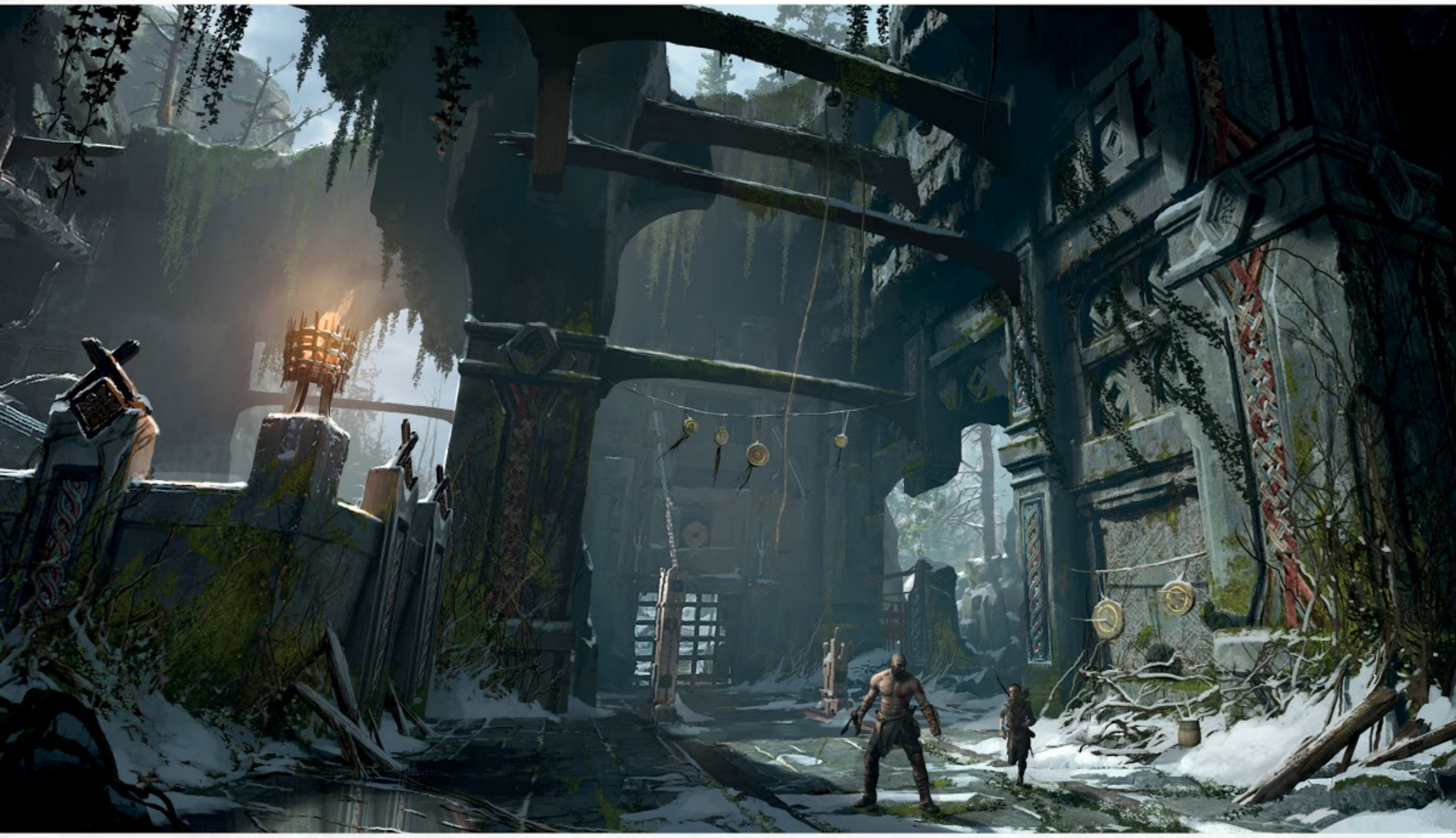
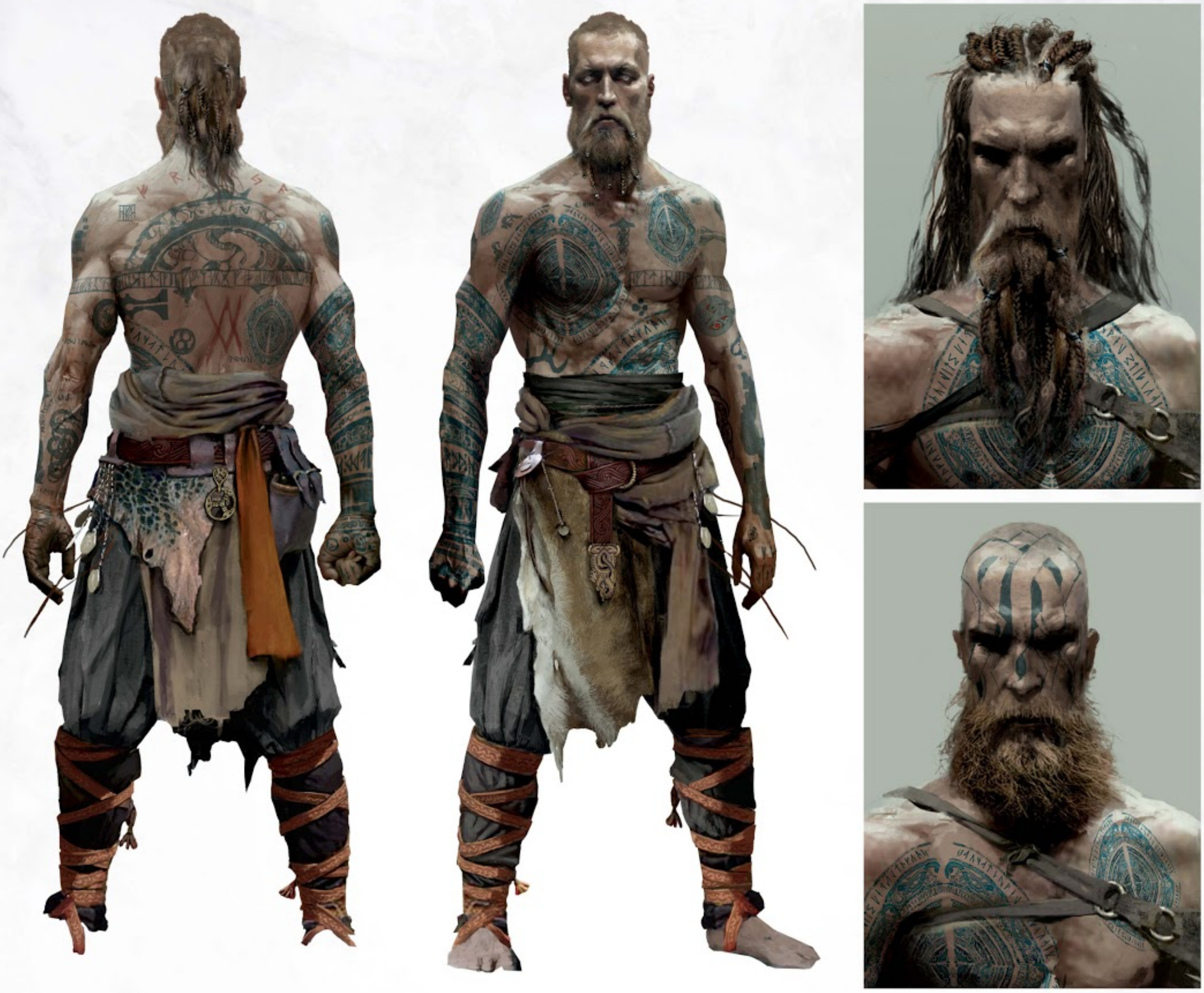
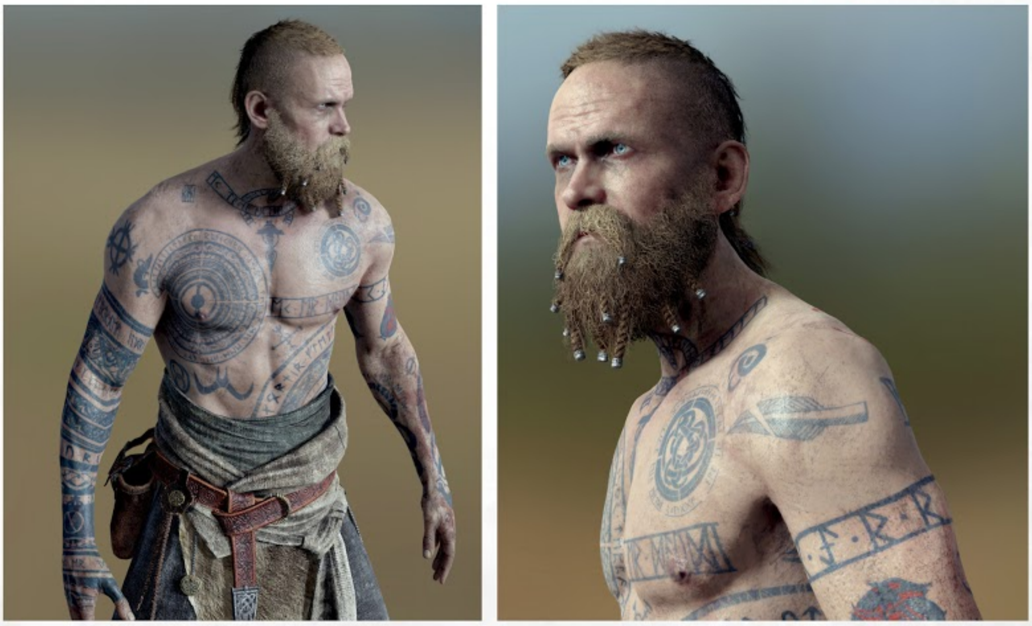




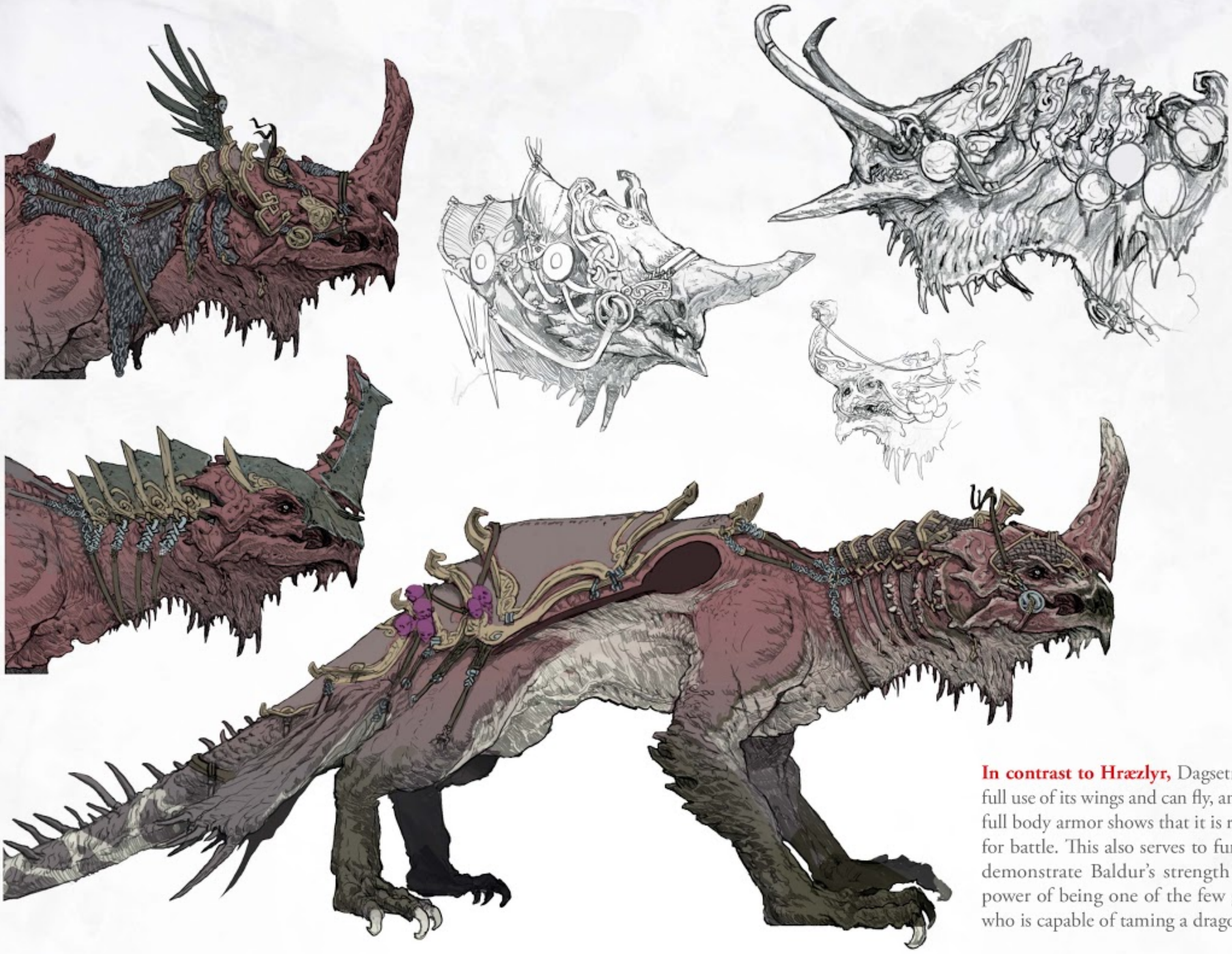
Artist: Mark Castanon



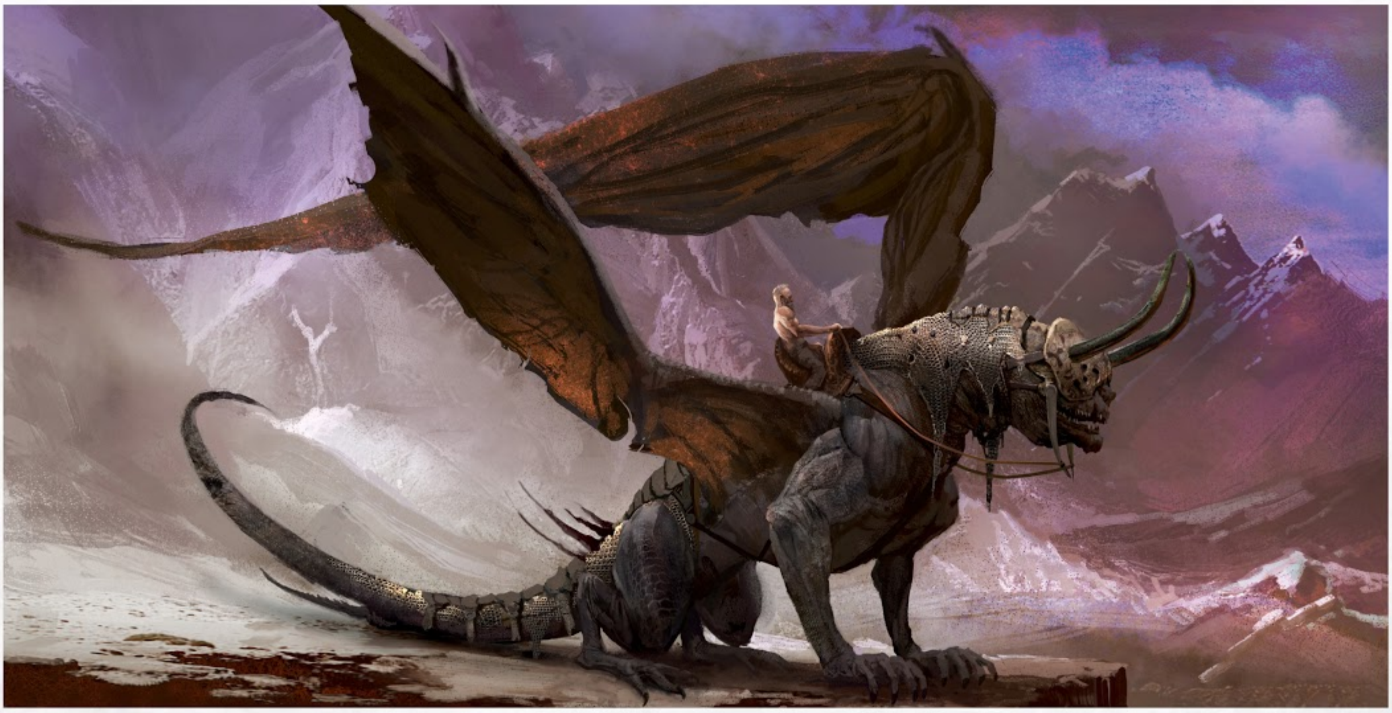
The team wanted each deity's look to reflect the harsh landscape in which they live, while simultaneously implying a personal history in their design. The tattooed god, Baldur, is a fitting example of this goal. Covered in a mix of personal and protection staves, he wears his story on his skin.



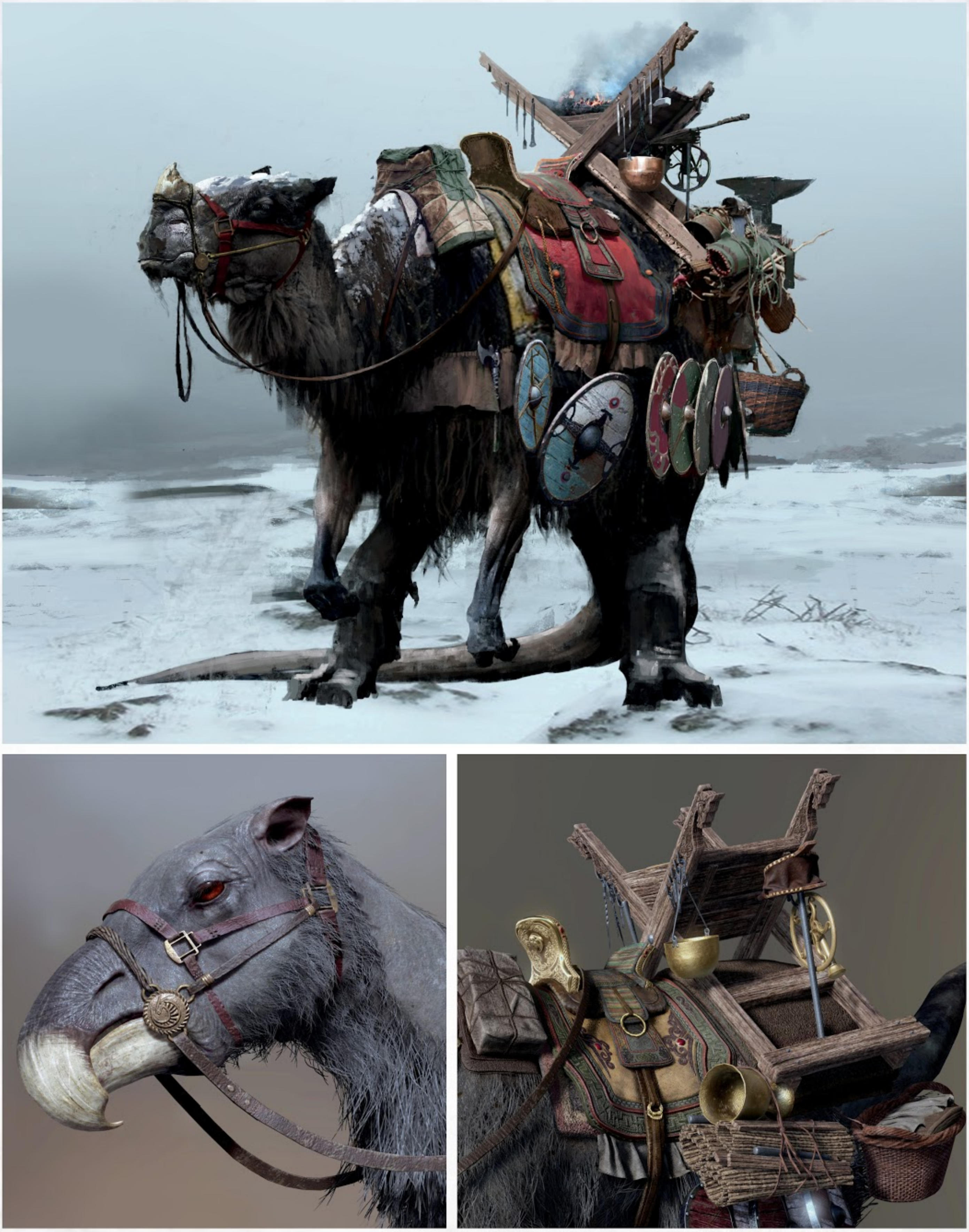
Baldur concept—designing a new look for the gods. Artists: José Cabrera (top); Rafael Grassetti, Chris Gillett (bottom)



In contrast to Hræzlyr, Dagsetr has full use of its wings and can fly, and its full body armor shows that it is ready for battle. This also serves to further demonstrate Baldur's strength and power of being one of the few gods who is capable of taming a dragon.



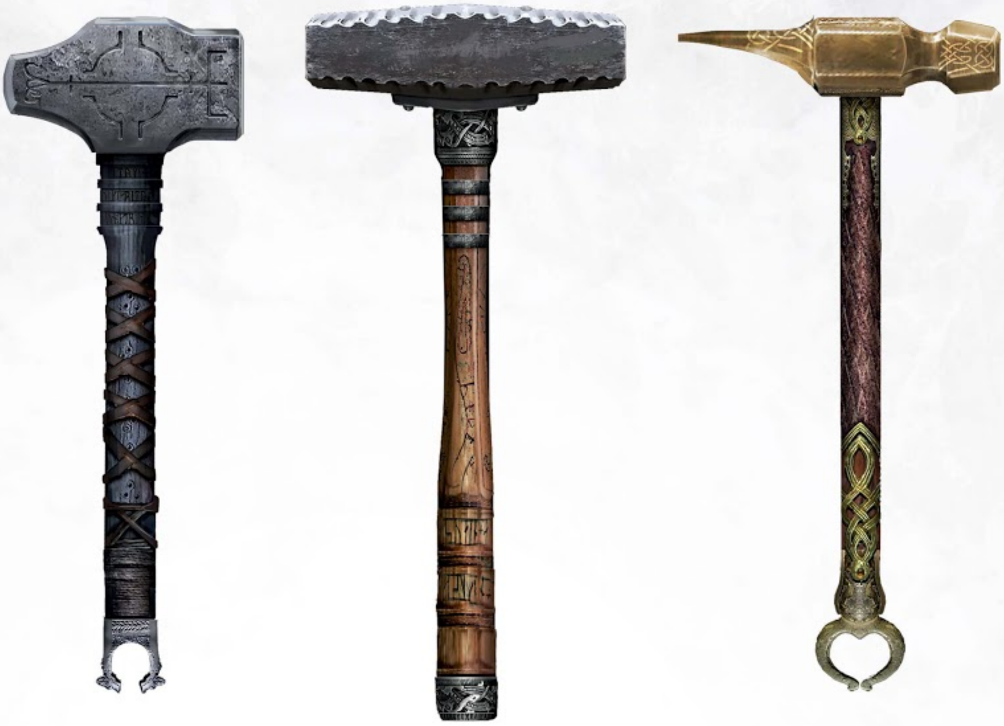
Dagsetr—beast of the god. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Vance Kovacs (bottom)

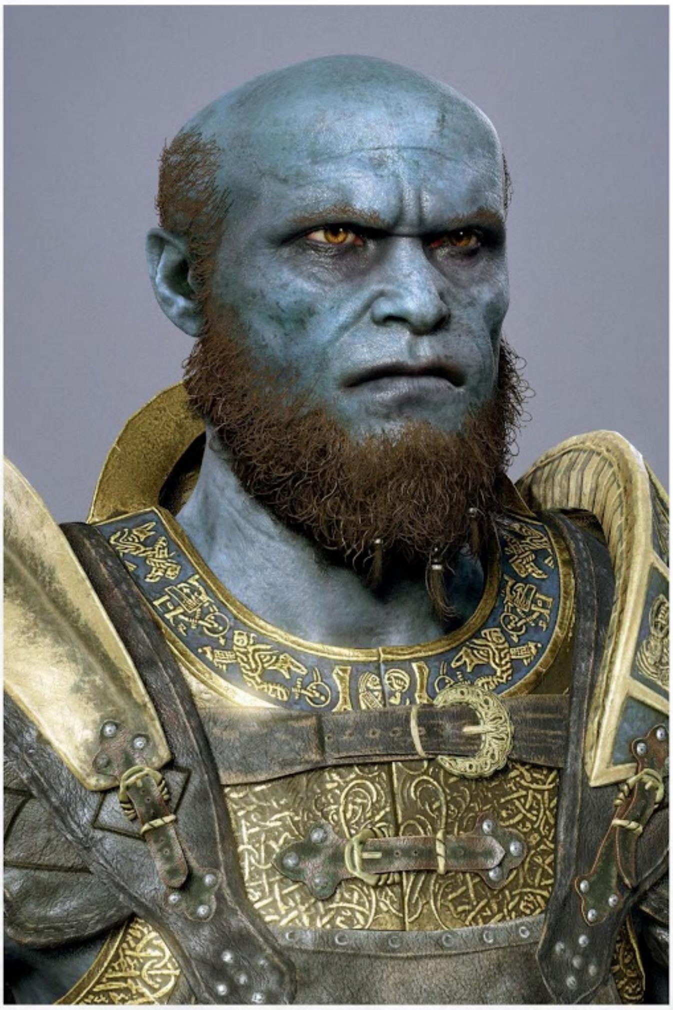


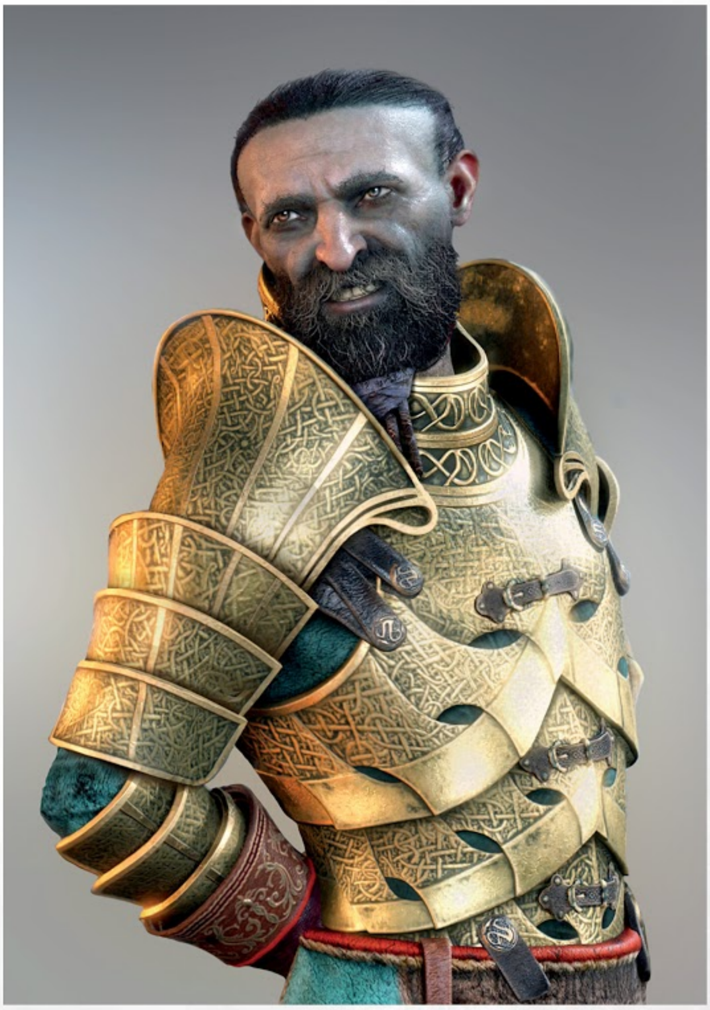
Huldra creature—the portable forge. Artists: José Cabrera (top); Glauco Longhi, Igor Catto (bottom)

The Huldra brothers, Brok and Sindri, are the Dwarf brothers who famously crafted Thor's hammer. The story reveals that they are also the pair who created the Leviathan Axe, which Kratos wields throughout the game.

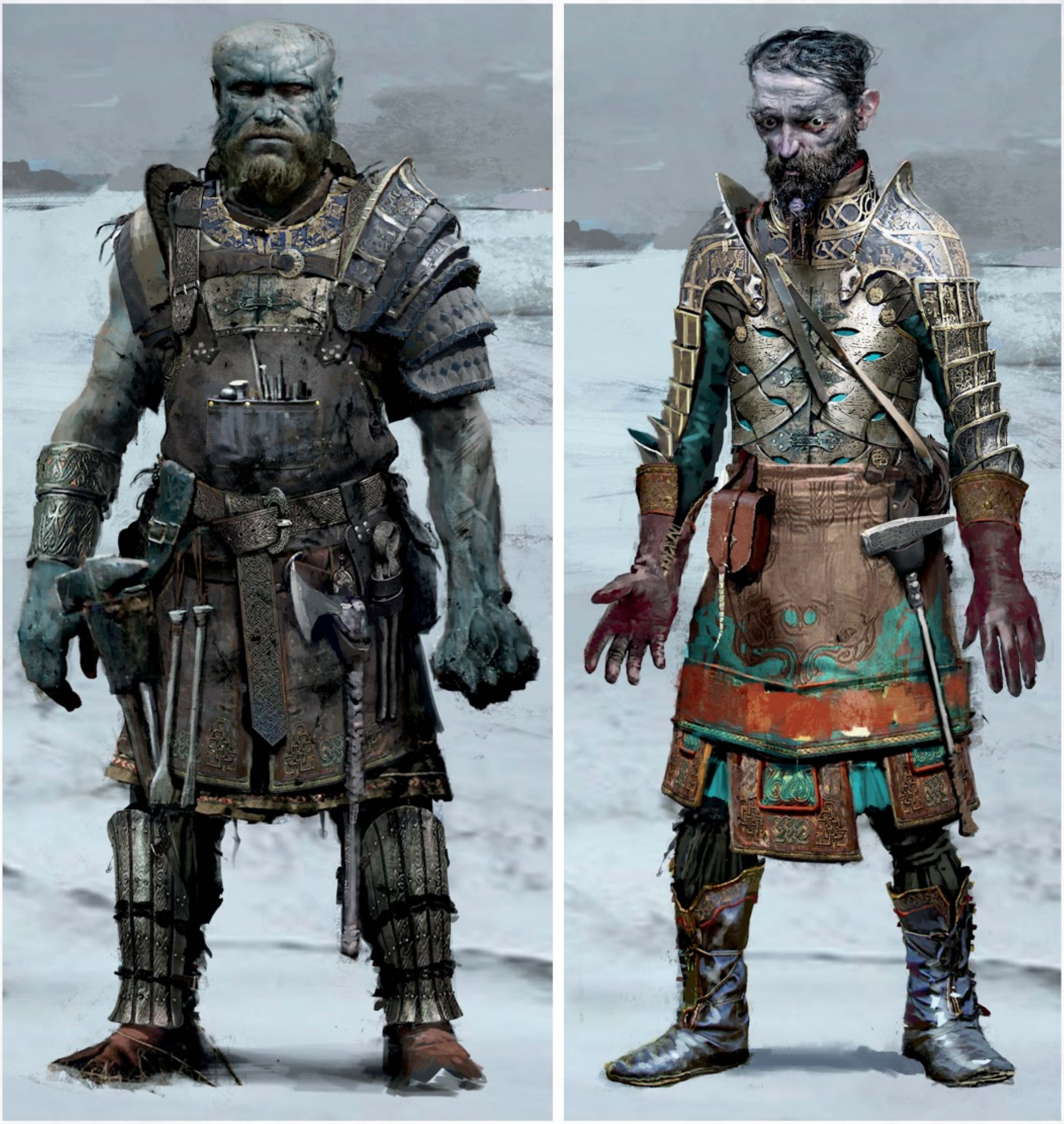
The team wanted their expertise in blacksmithing and weapon-making to be reflected in their character design, so along with the blacksmithing tools, José included some intricate metal work in their costumes.

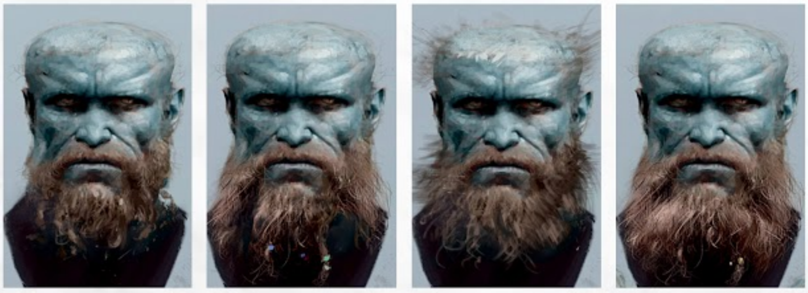






Further designs of the Huldra Brothers, the weaponsmiths of the world. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Rafael Grassetti (bottom left, bottom right); Chris Gillett (bottom right)

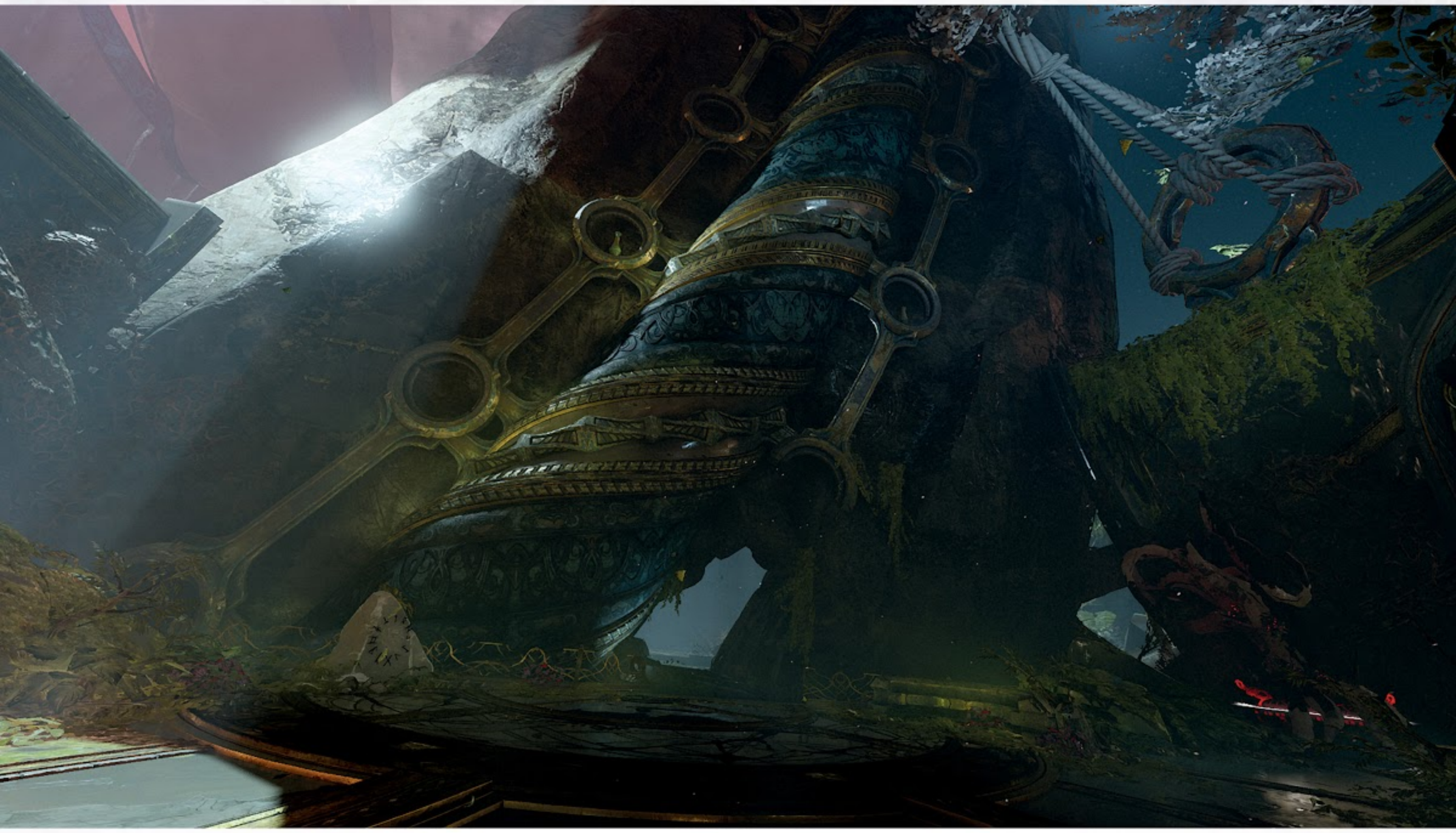




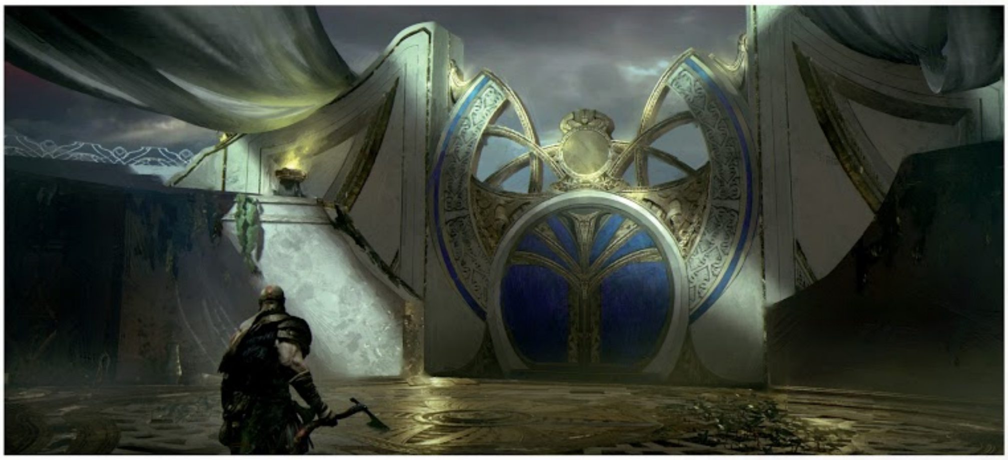
Brok and Sindri. Artist: José Cabrera

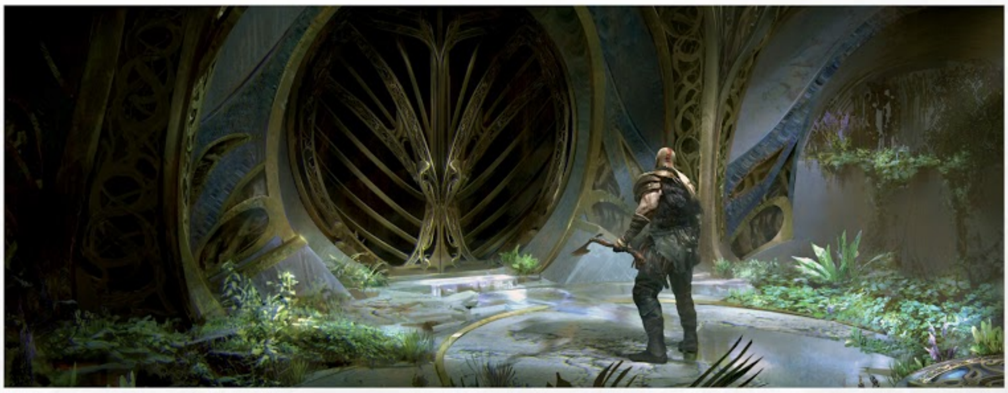
While both brothers are outstanding metalsmiths, Sindri's talents are demonstrated in the meticulous, intricate details of his craft, while Brok's strengths lay in his ability to bend raw mythical ore into any shape.

Their combined mastery is unmatched in any of the realms. Brok's skin has taken on a bluish grey hue from all his exposure to working with metals like silver.

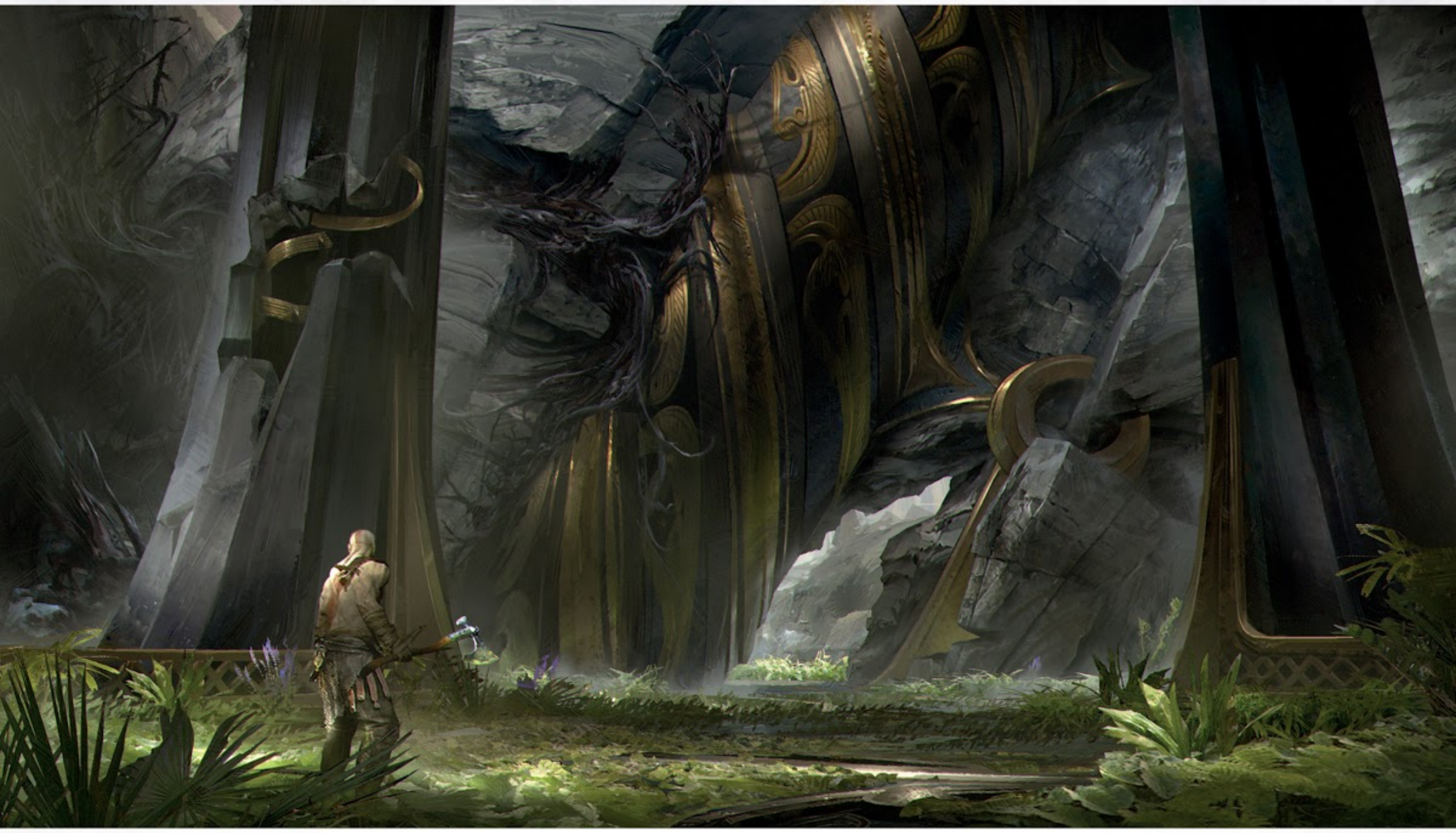


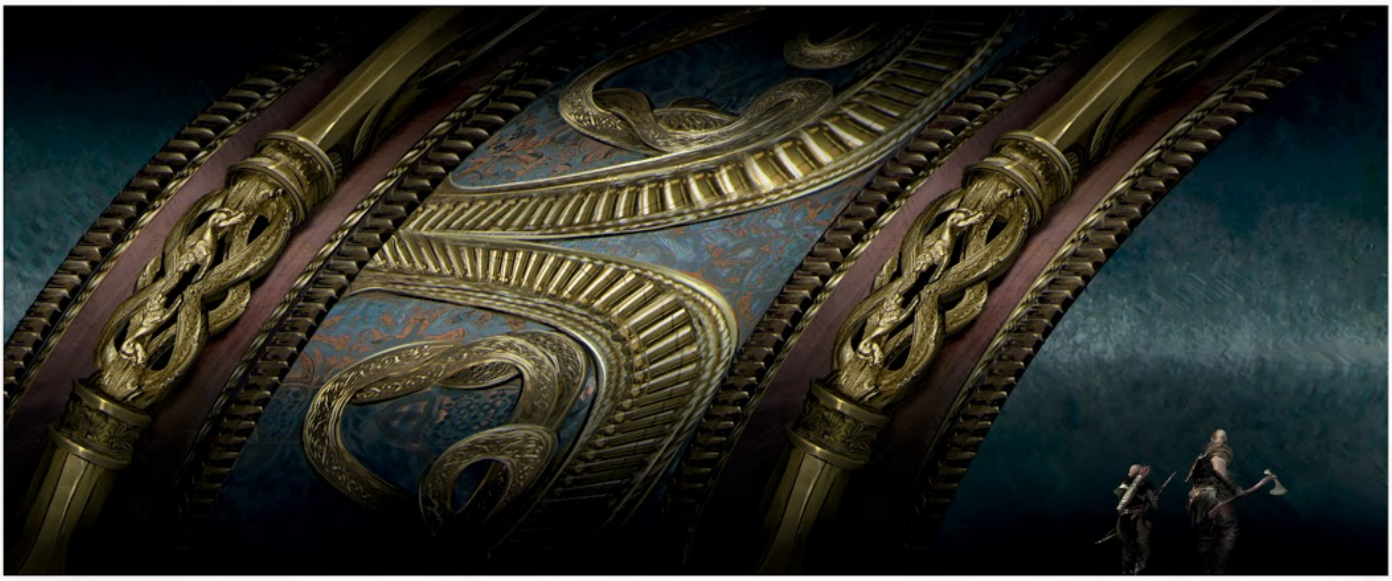
At this point, Álfheim was very far along in production and the concept work here serves mainly to clarify the spaces for the 3-D artists. Once the team is this far into production, most of the work looks very close to what will ultimately be in the final game. One of the team's main goals was to give each area in the game a distinct look, so that when someone sees a screenshot or a stream of the game online, they know precisely where the player is.

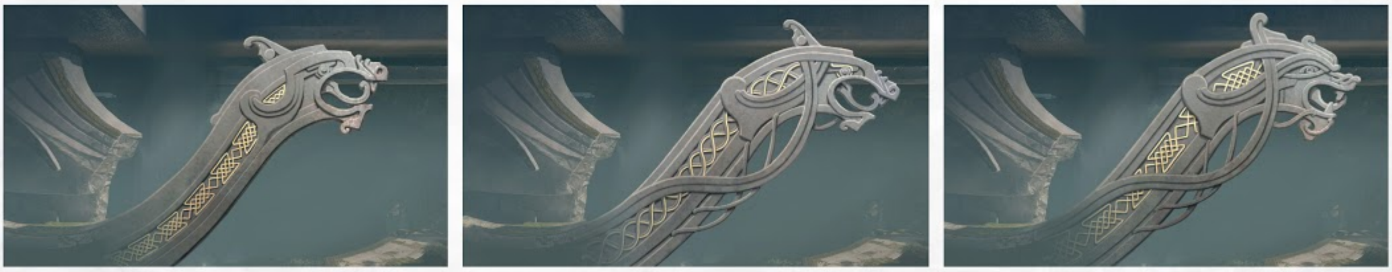




Álfheim architecture. Artists: Erik Jakobsen, Charleen Au, Sarah Swenson (top); Abe Taraky



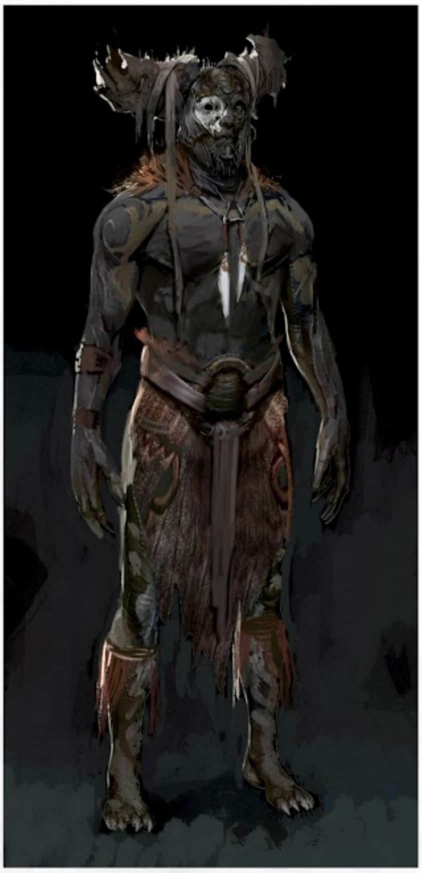


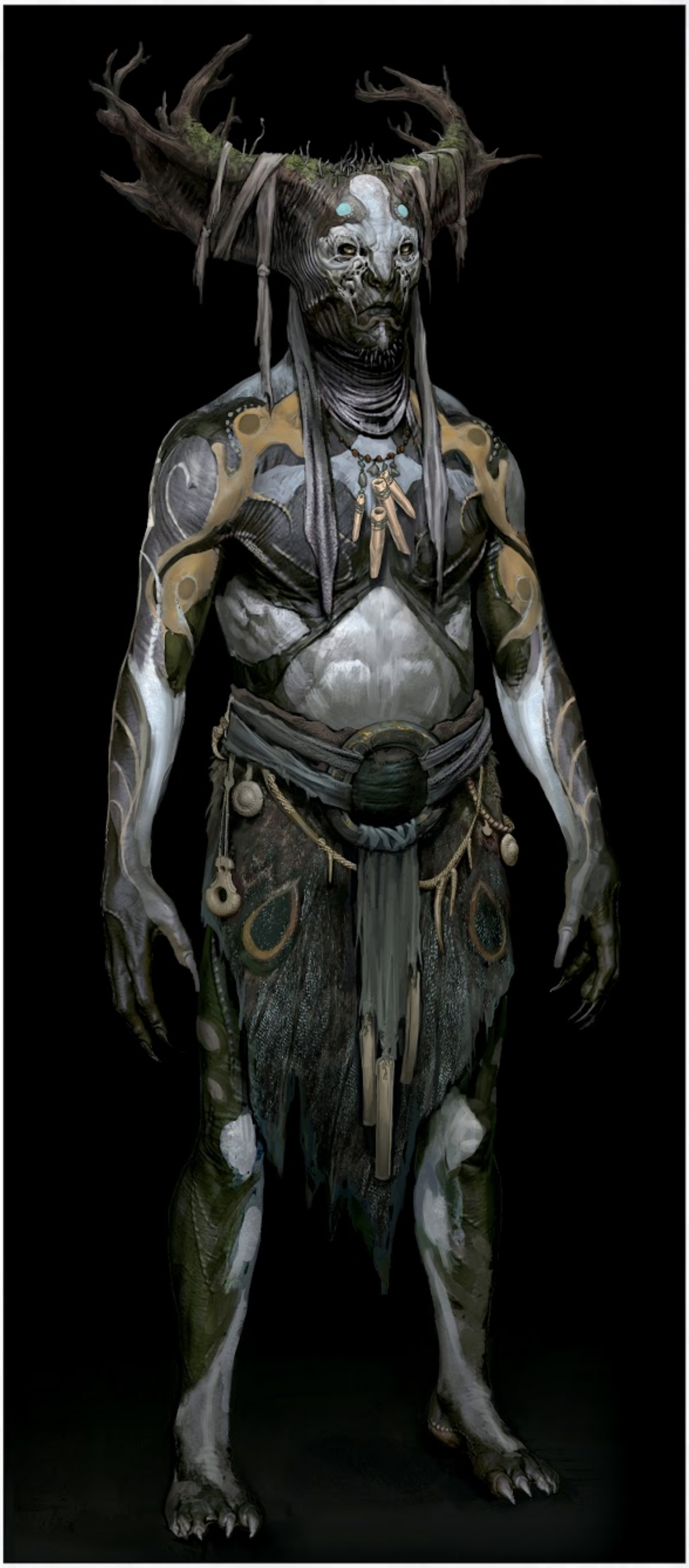


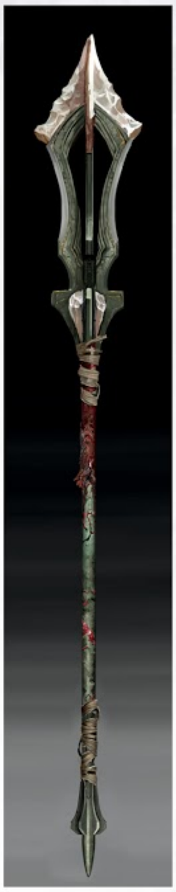
Artists: Abe Taraky (top, middle); Mark Castanon (bottom)

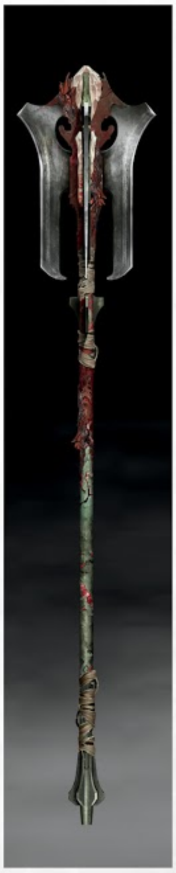
God of War's Dark Elf King character was designed to evoke a sense of power and majesty. Because he's the strongest of the Dark Elves and the boss of the Álfheim level, the team wanted him to be larger and more impressive. "We achieved this by making his horns larger, more complex, and giving him more elaborate patterning on his skin—evocative of moths and butterflies—and a more impressive weapon," said concept artist Yefim Kligerman.

The team also wanted to emphasize the natural elements of this character. "Instead of symmetrical bone horns on his head, his horns are more akin to tree trunks and branches, and with root-type growths on his face to further push that concept," said Kligerman. Some visual variations in the game include the red color from the hive material in their weapons and costumes.

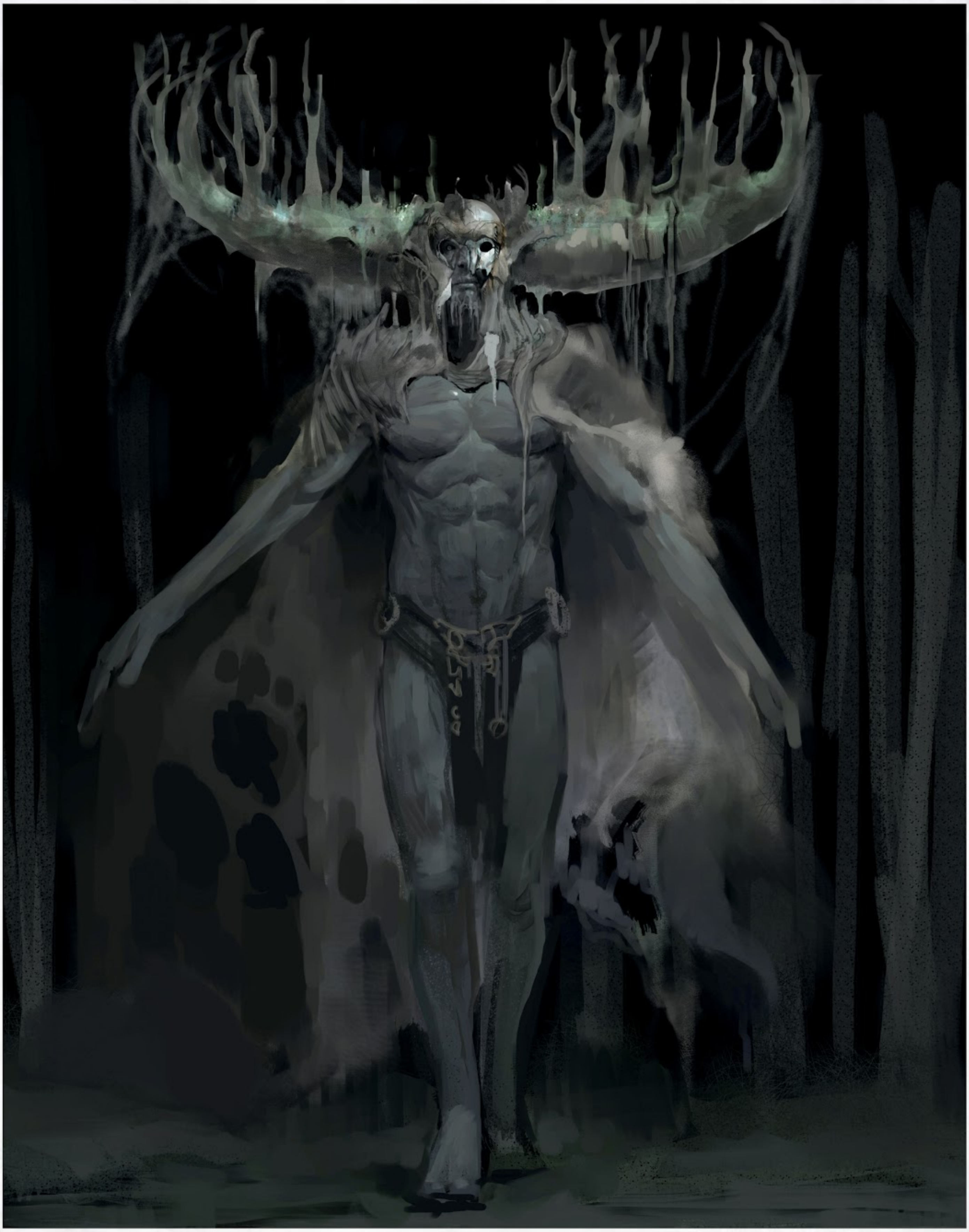




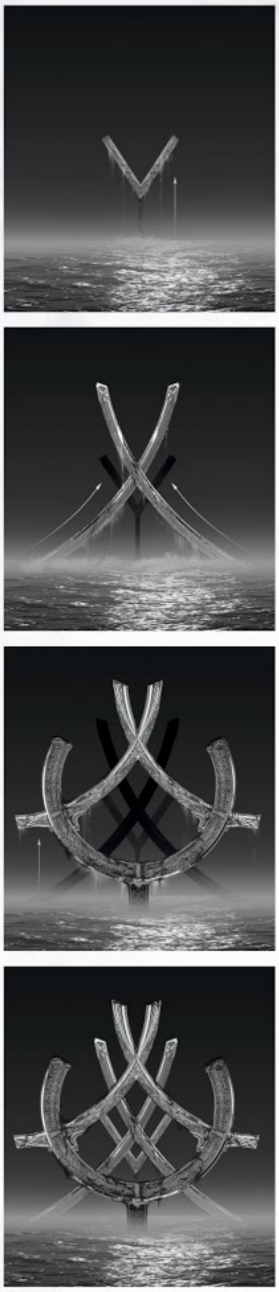




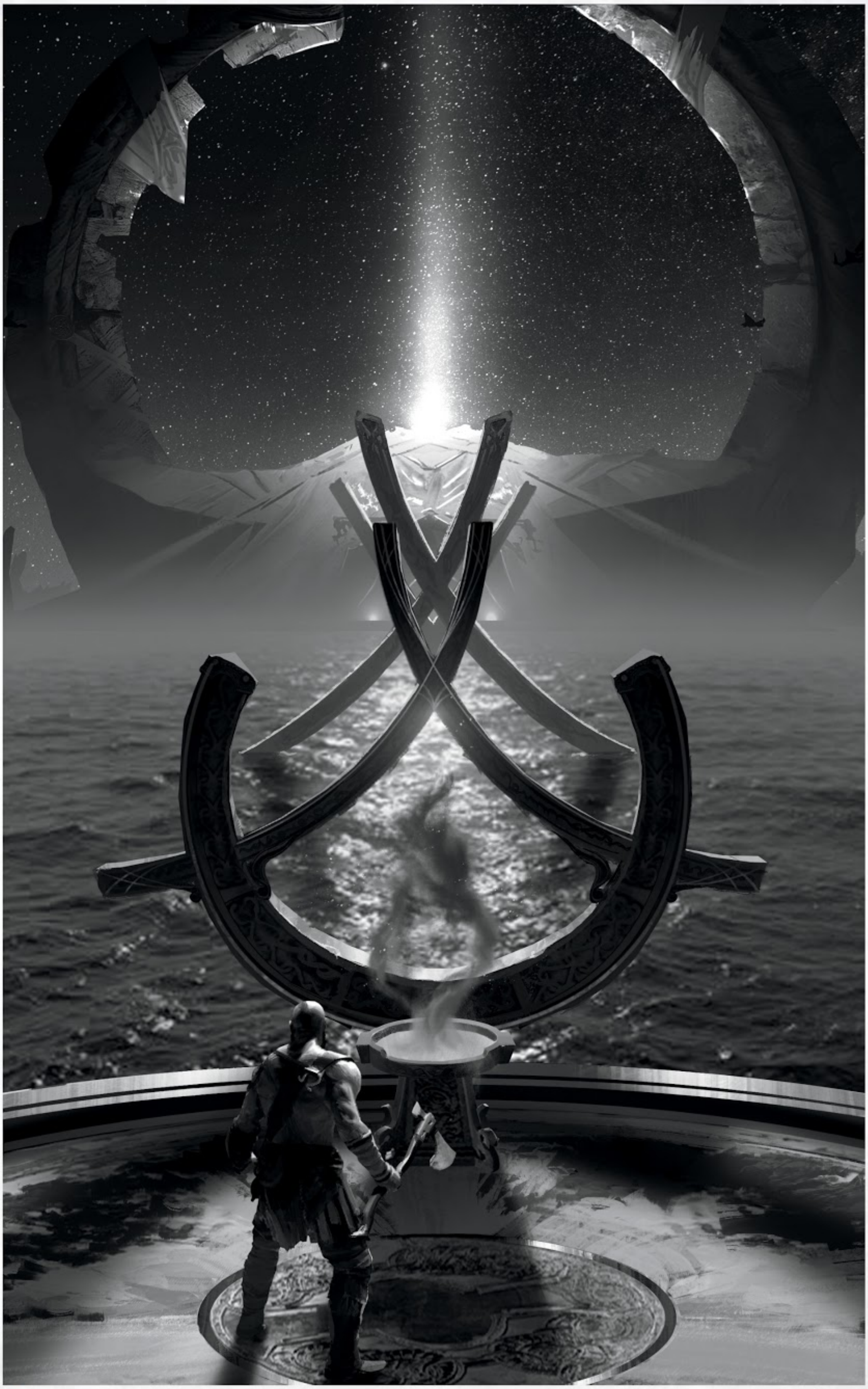
Dark Elf King. Artists: Vance Kovacs (bottom left, middle); Yefim Kligerman



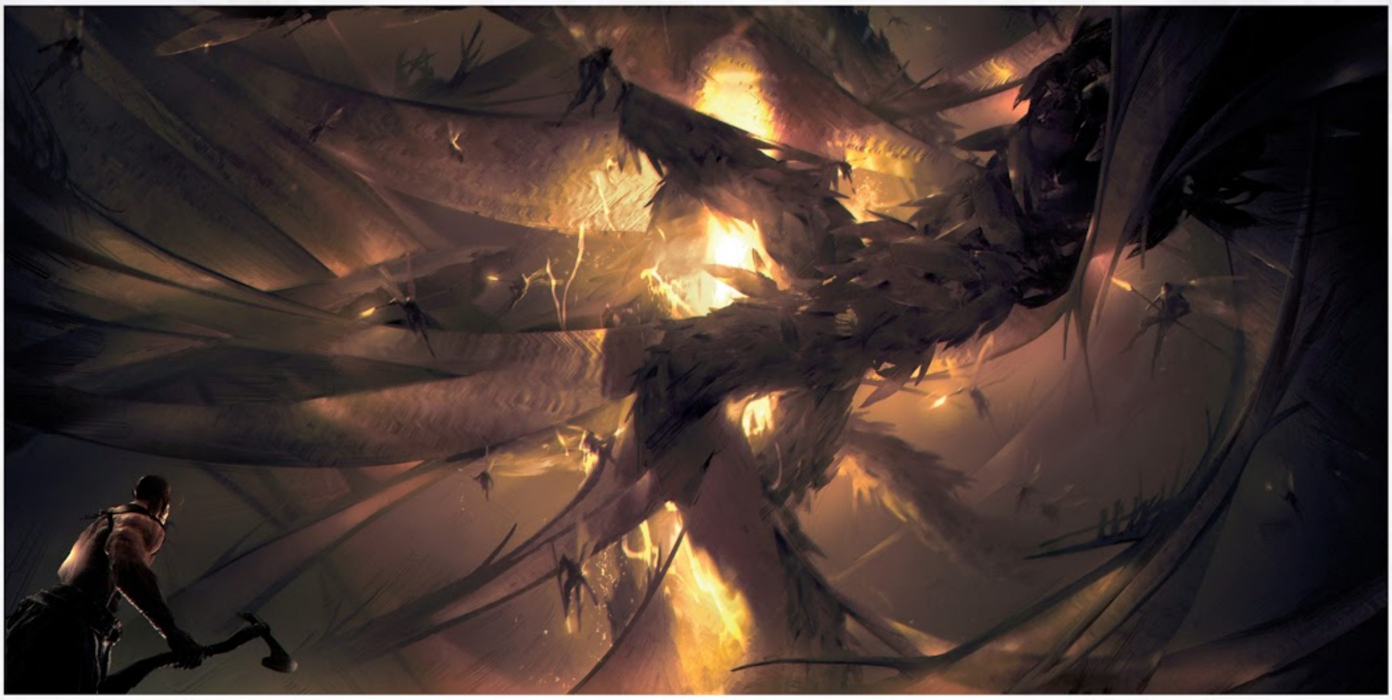
Artist: Vance Kovacs

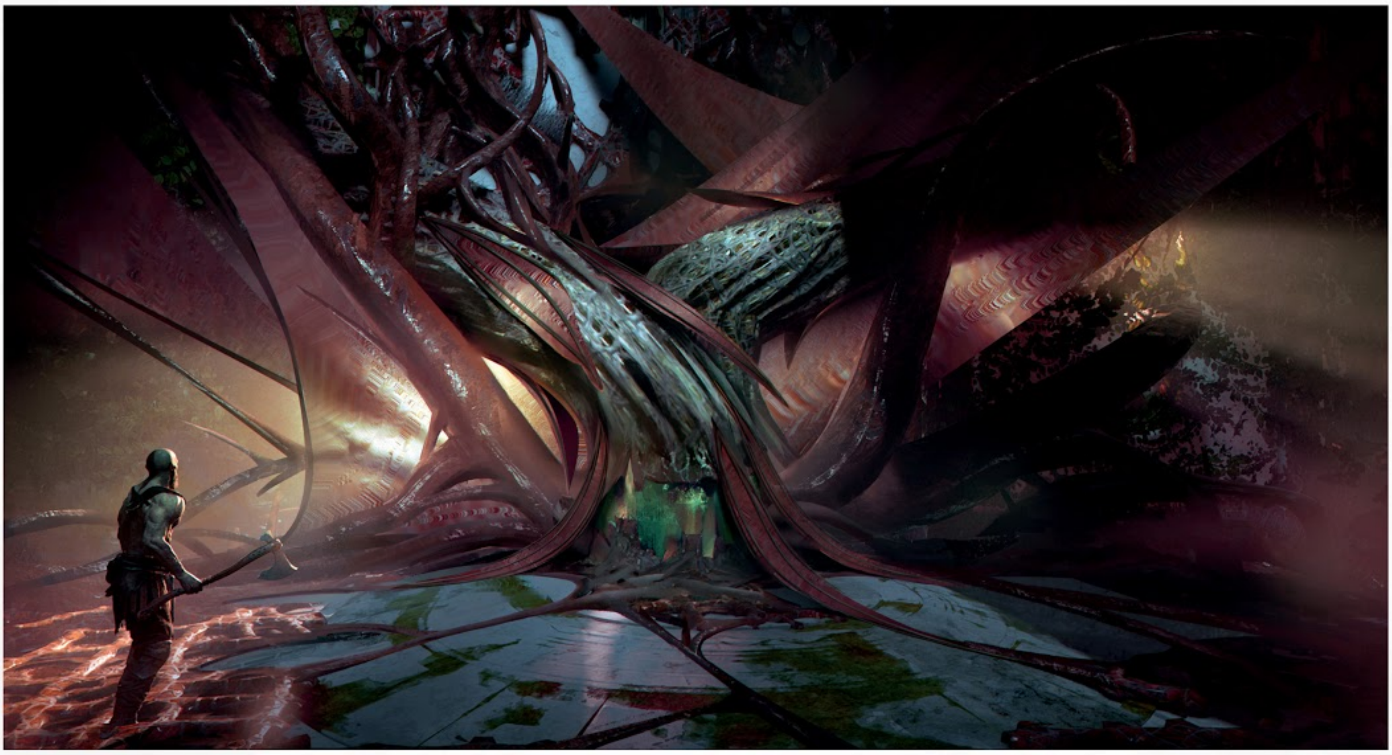


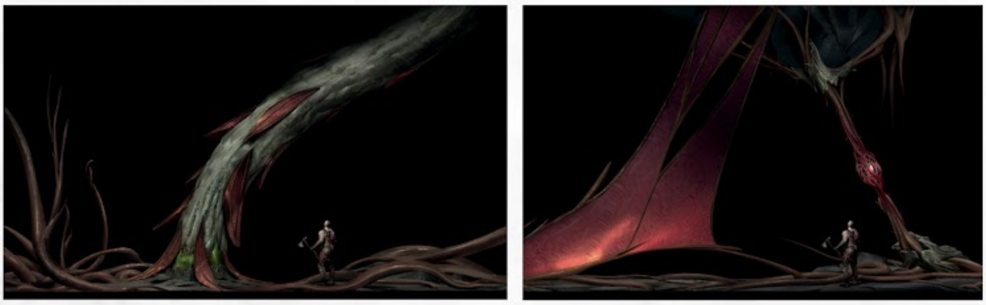
For many of the game's sand bowl puzzles, the level designers wanted to implement large environmental surprises—for instance, raising the giant symbols out of the water and lining them up, as shown in these illustrations.



Álfheim sand bowl. Artist: Jin Kim



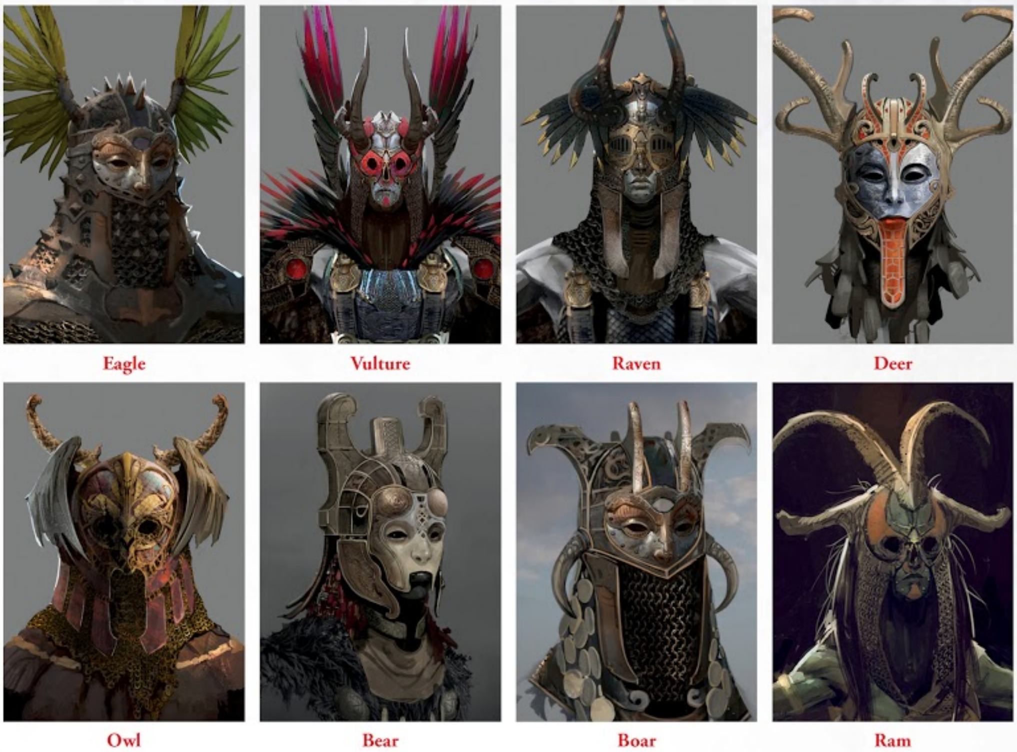




The team had a vague concept for the Dusk Veil from early on, but still needed to find a language for the Dusk Veil material that would be growing throughout. Senior concept artist Abe Taraky was instrumental in developing a set of assets that could be combined to make different tendrils and coverings for the level.

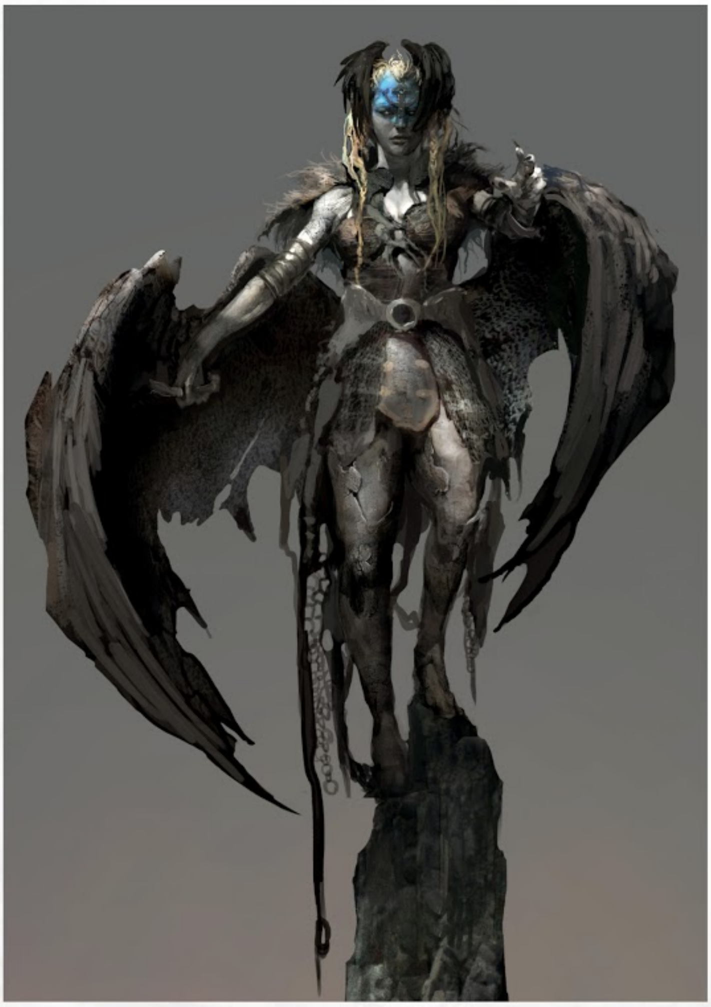
Inside the Dusk Veil. Artist: Abe Taraky

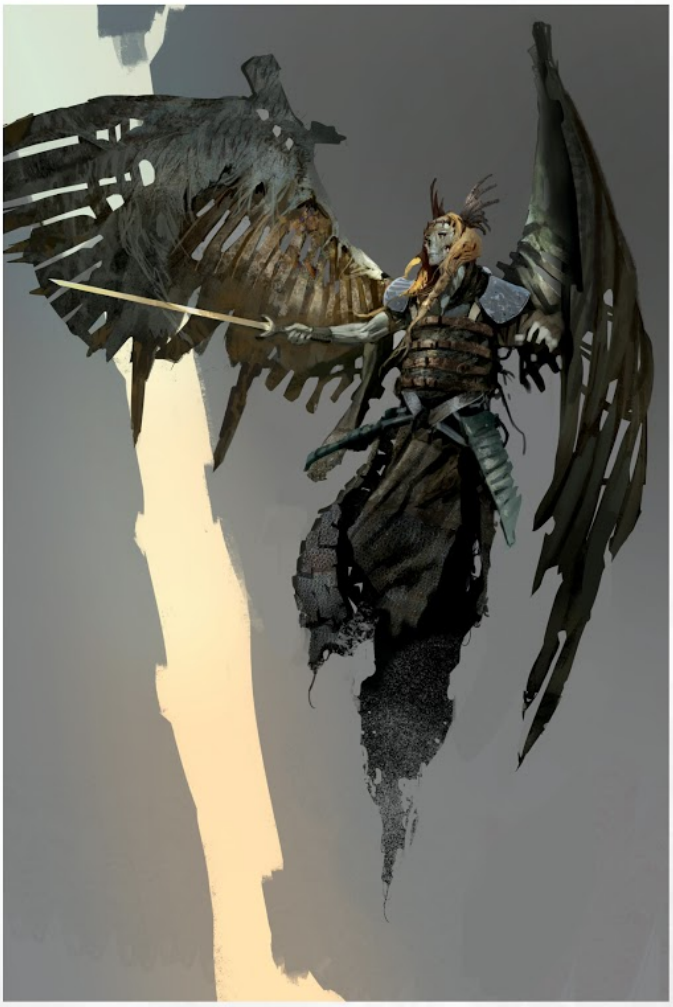
From the start of development, director Cory Barlog's idea was for the Valkyries to wear a harness of metal wings, rather than possess natural feathered wings. "In our version of the narrative, these wings have been bestowed by Odin to each of his nine handpicked warriors," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish. "As this concept developed, the wings became an effective attack mechanism unto themselves; and using their wings in battle, these skilled warriors are also capable of pulling weapons out of thin air using their mastery of Bifröst abilities. Concept artist Vance Kovacs created a number of masked versions, and being unable to read the emotions on their faces added to their imposing visage. For the masks, we based each one on a different animal, with the queen being the most mythical of them all, a dragon."



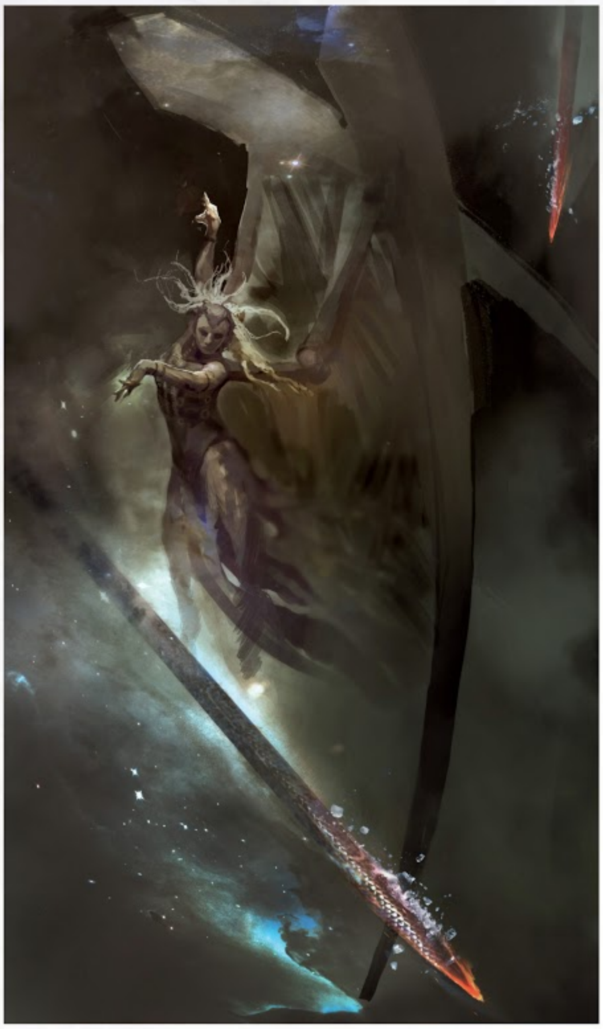
Eagle **Vulture** **Raven** **Deer**

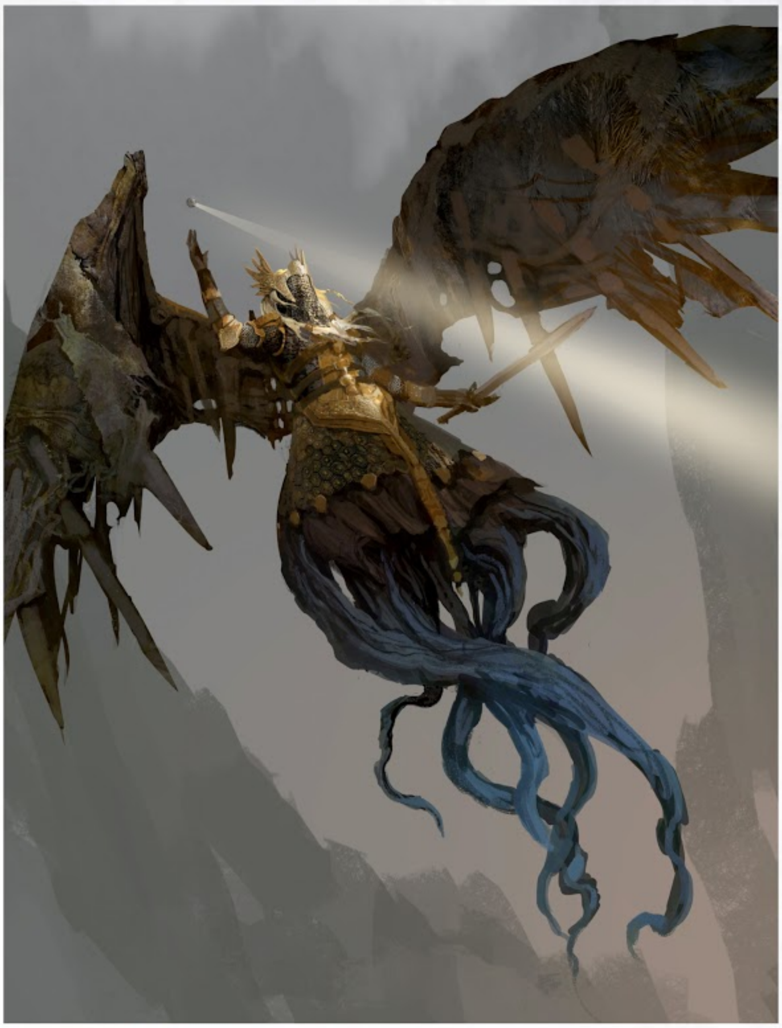
Owl **Bear** **Boar** **Ram**

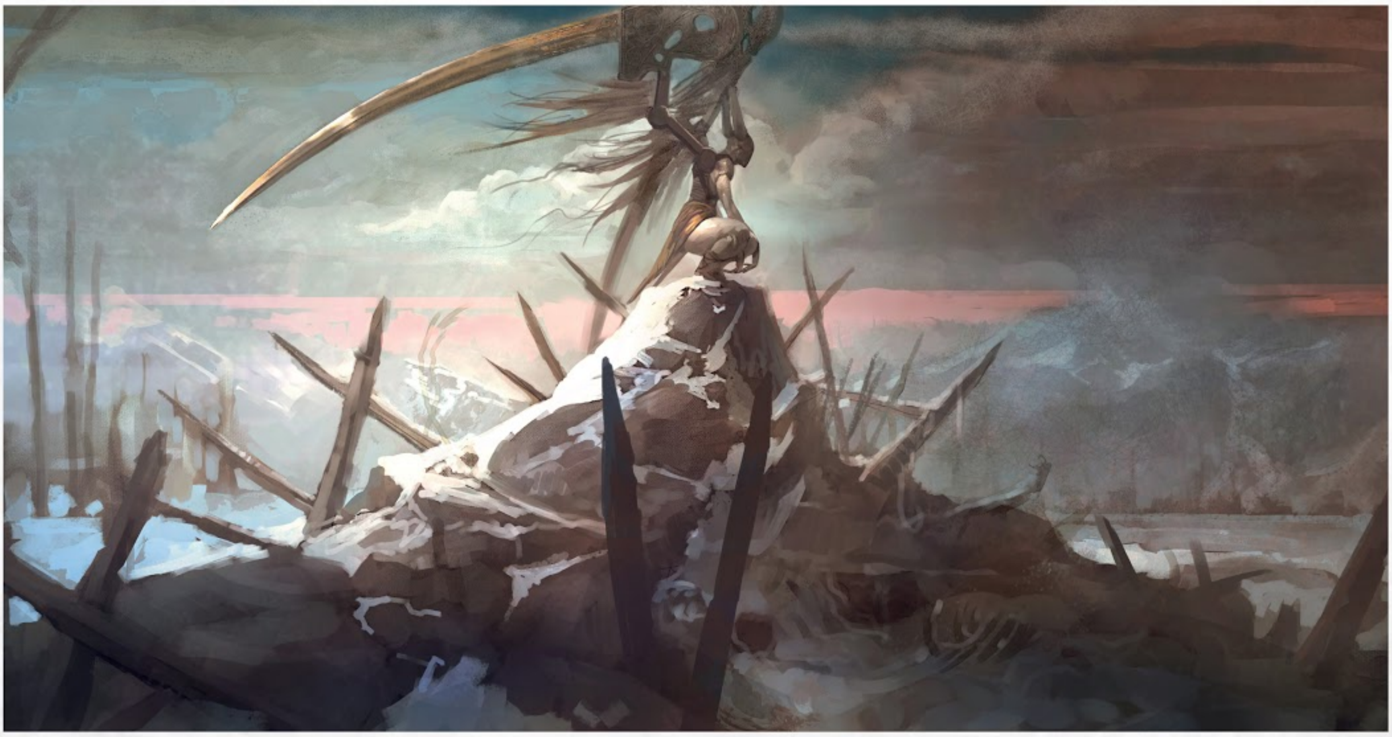




Valkyrie concepts—redesigning classic characters. Artists: Stephen Oakley, Dela Longfish (top); Vance Kovacs (this page)

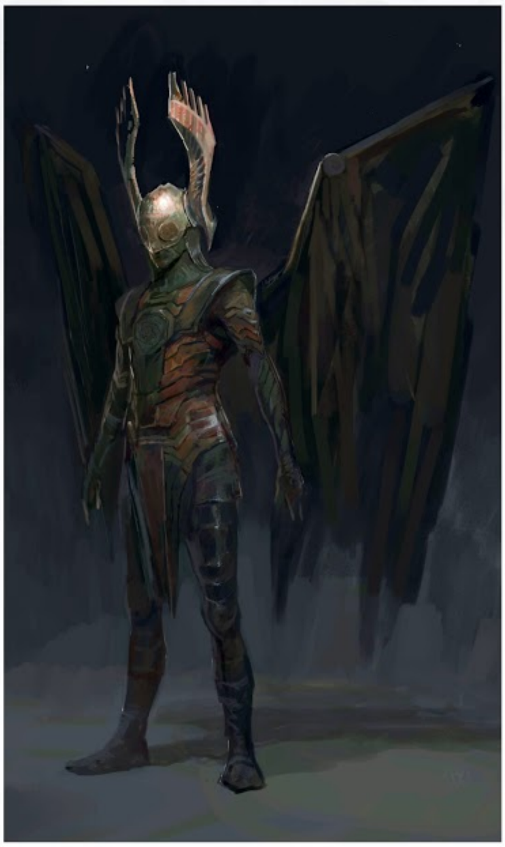


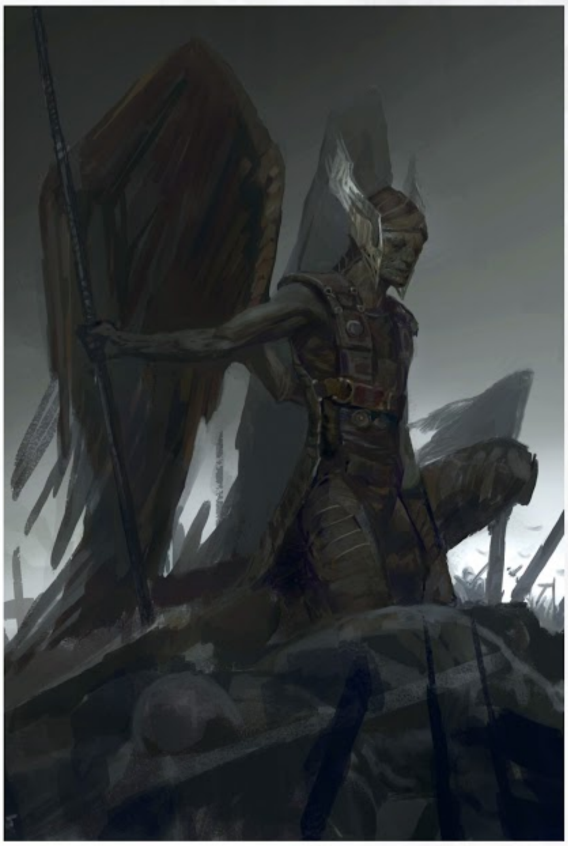


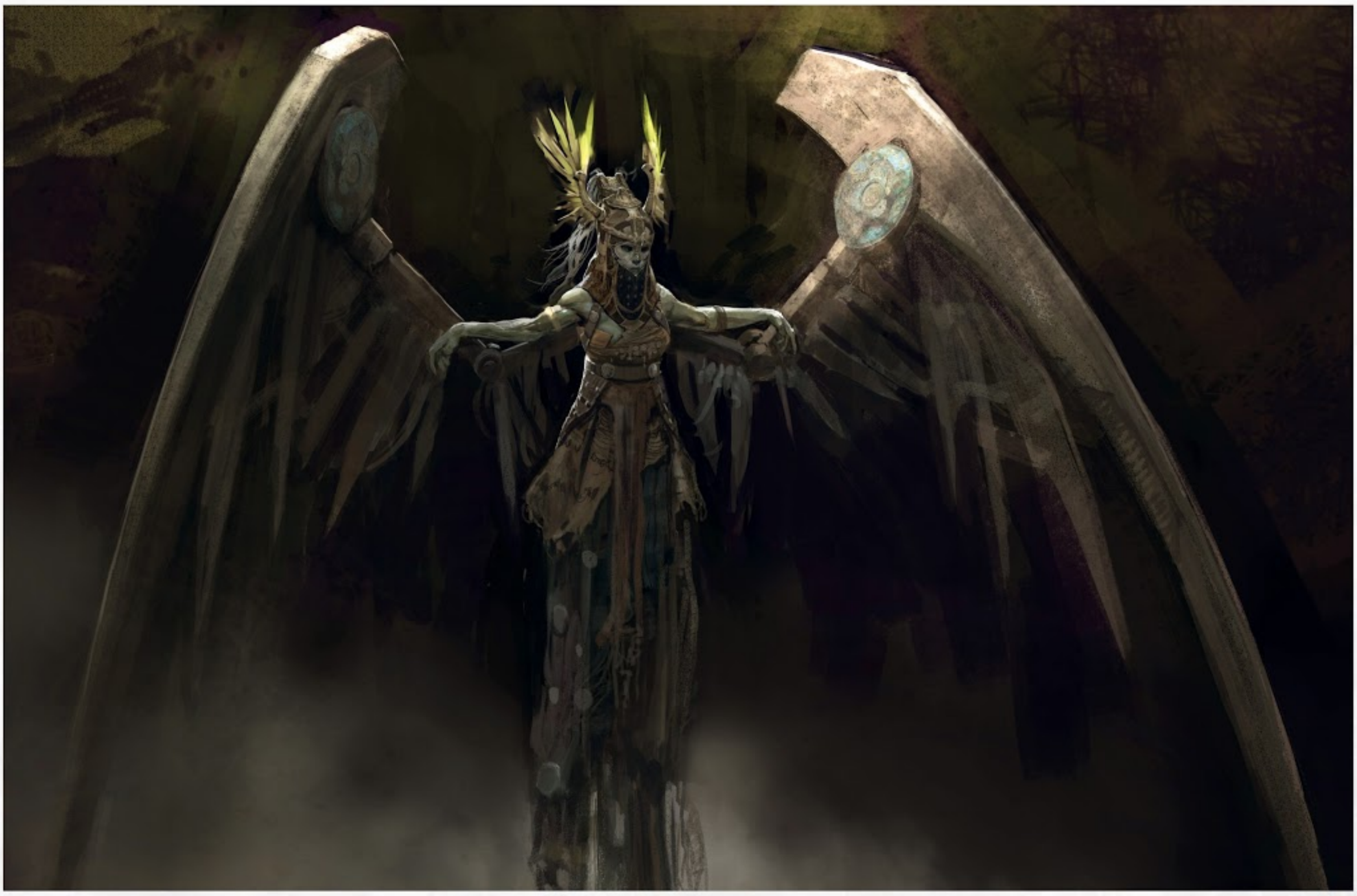


Early concept of the Valkyrie surveying the battlefield for worthy souls. Artist: Vance Kovacs

Justin Sweet and Vance Kovacs did these haunting designs for the Valkyries that struck a great balance between their elegant and frightening natures. These pieces set the tonal direction for this set of characters. Out of the group of nine Valkyries, the team wanted the queen to feel unique from all the others. Aside from her armor being based on a dragon José made a version with gilded gold armor that helped make her design standout.







A harness of metal wings. Artist: Justin Sweet

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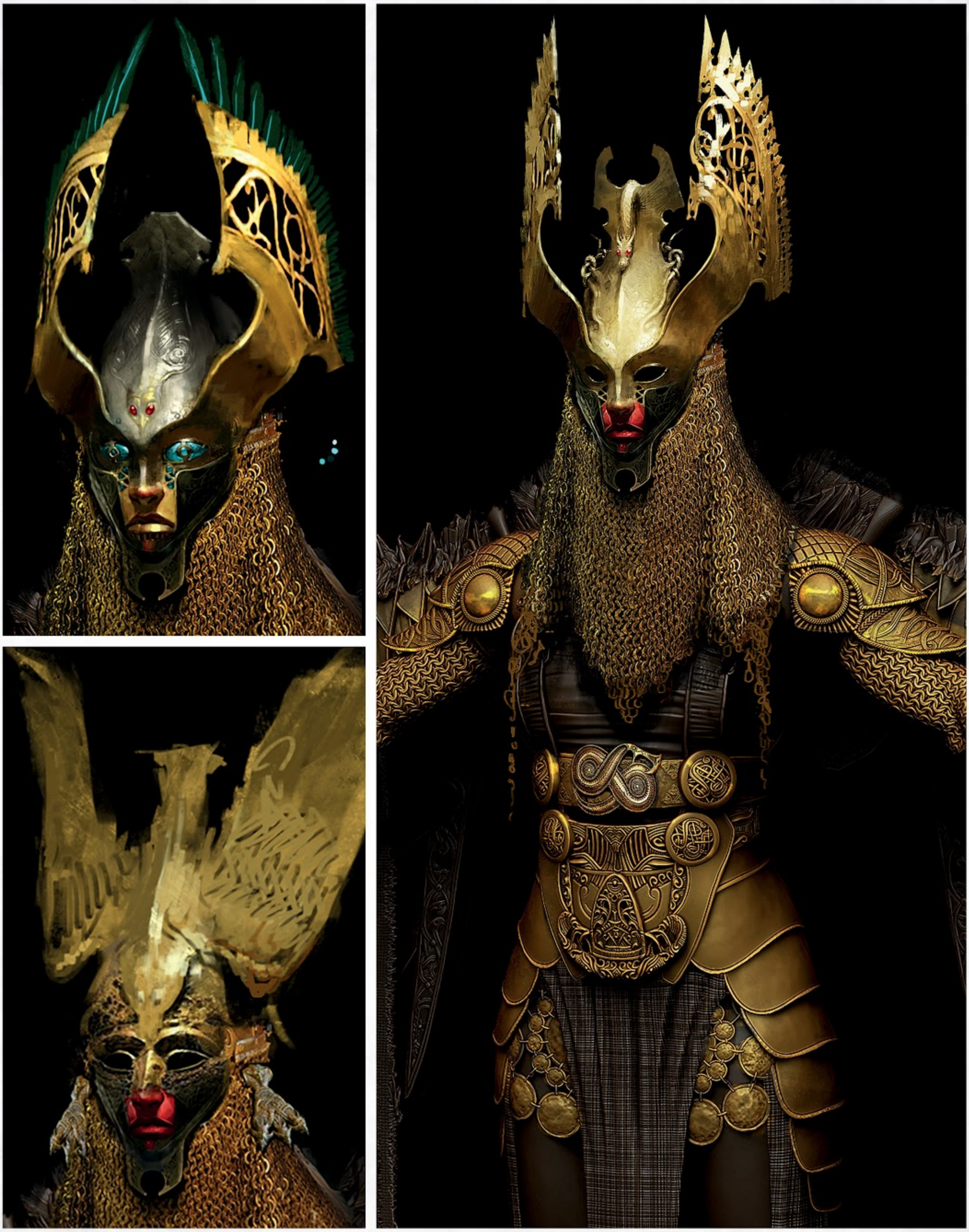
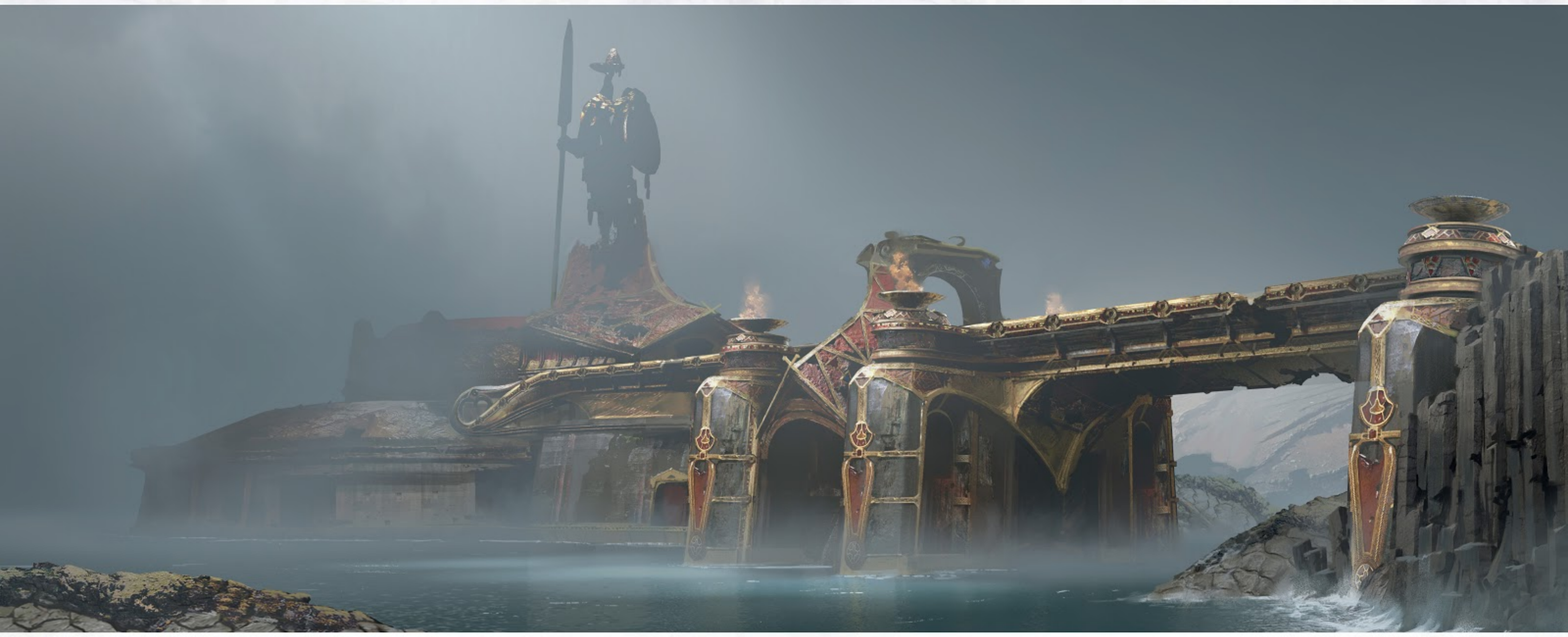
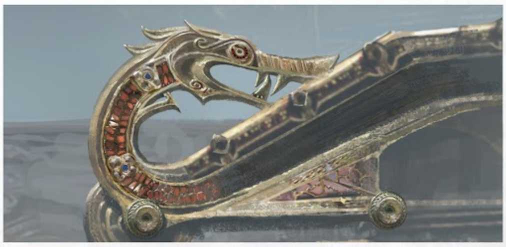


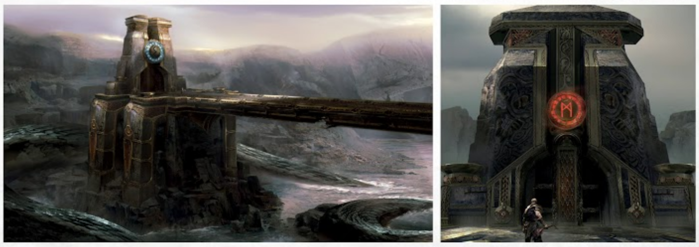
The Gilded Queen. Artists: Igor Catto (right); José Cabrera (this page)



After many iterations, the level design for Týr's Temple was finally being locked down, but the team still struggled with the level's visual aspects. It wasn't until several new sketches depicted Týr as a strong, imposing monument atop the temple that the team was satisfied with the level's artistic direction. It was also decided that the architectural materials would consist of black, polished volcanic rock and red glass with gold accents, giving it a strong, powerful, and rather ostentatious aesthetic.

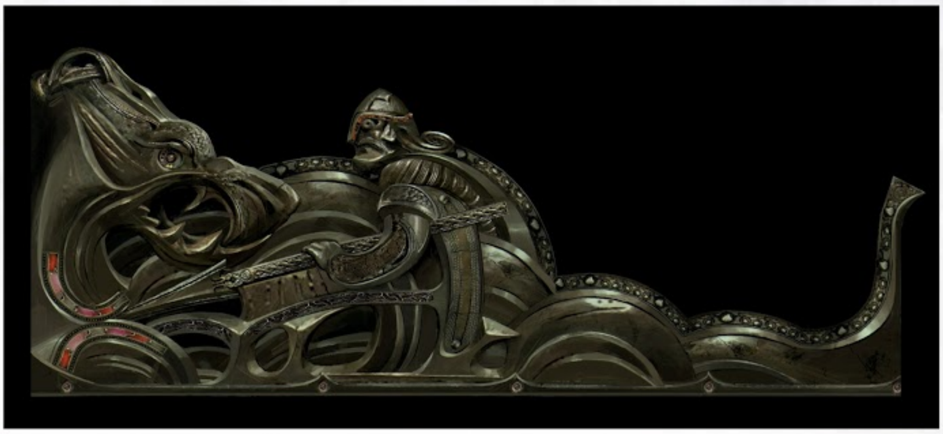


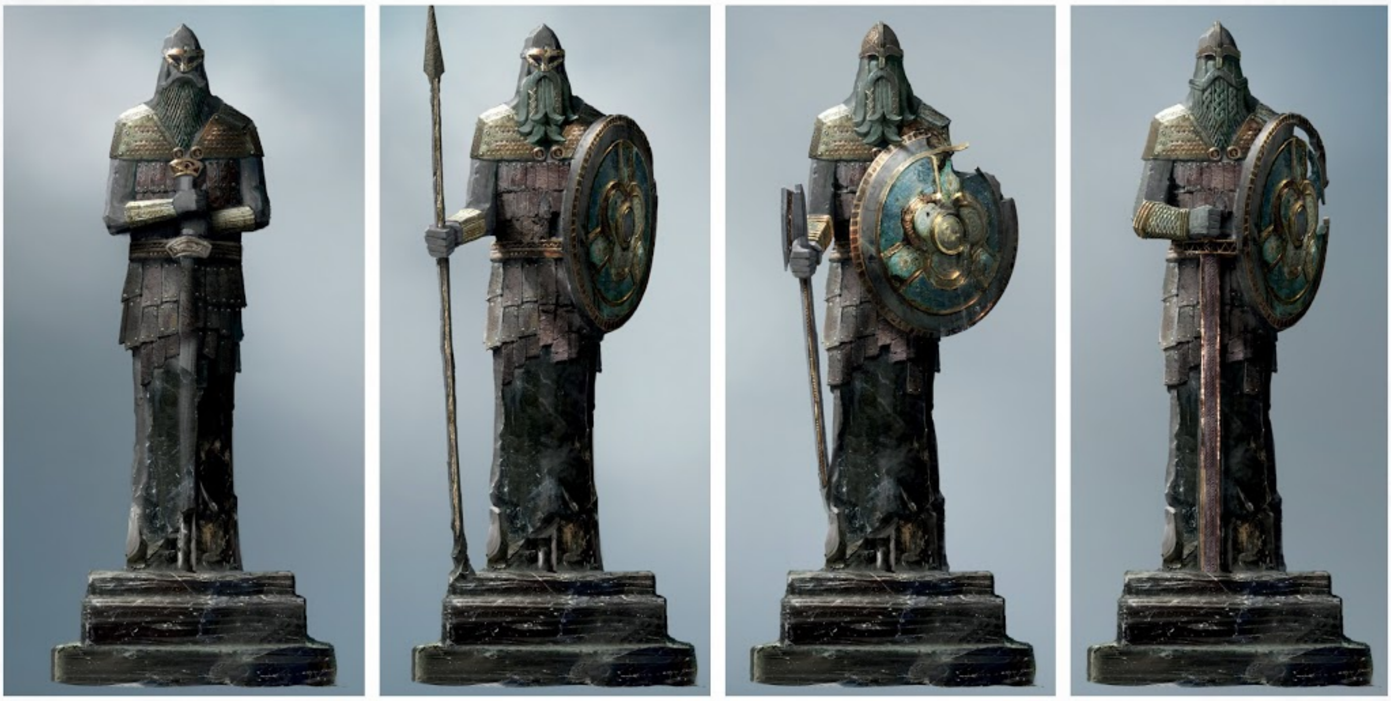
Opulence of Týr. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Jin Kim (bottom)



Artist: Abe Taraky (bottom)

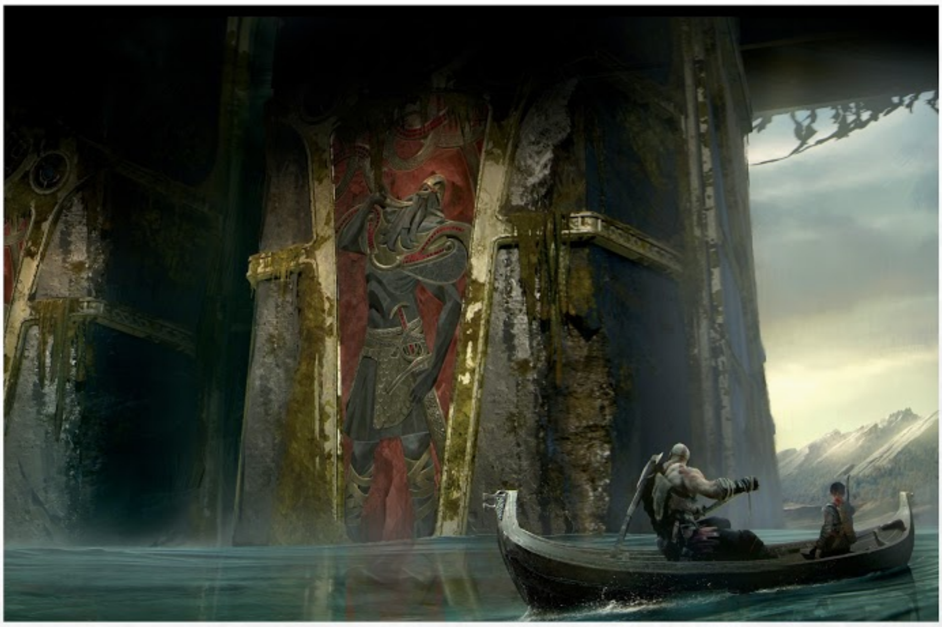
Springing from the middle of the Lake of Nine, an enormous and decaying statue of Týr reigns over the location. “The idea behind the statue is that if the Lake of Nine Temple’s opulence was a reflection of Týr’s personality, then this statue was meant to embody Týr’s stature,” said senior concept artist Abe Taraky. When Kratos and Atreus arrive at the Lake of Nine for the first time, they see half of the decrepit statue above the water line. The rest of the statue is submerged, along with the hidden Lake of Nine Temple. The inscription on the statue’s chest is an order to Kratos and Atreus, telling them to forfeit their weapons into the lake.





The Týr statue was designed with the consideration that its builder had access to a variety of different cultures—hence the armor and weapons having a historically “mixed” look. This intentional sampling of different eras resulted in various parts of the design being influenced by different cultures—for example, while the chest armor is derived from Nordic and Celtic cultures, the helmet has Egyptian and Persian traits in its shape and detailing.

It’s only later in their journey that the father and son realize that the statue’s poor condition is not merely the result of natural decay, but also of a great battle that took place surrounding it. This conflict resulted in Týr’s mysterious disappearance and the flooding of the Lake of Nine.



Týr and his army. Artists: Abe Taraky (top, bottom, opposite); Jin Kim (middle)

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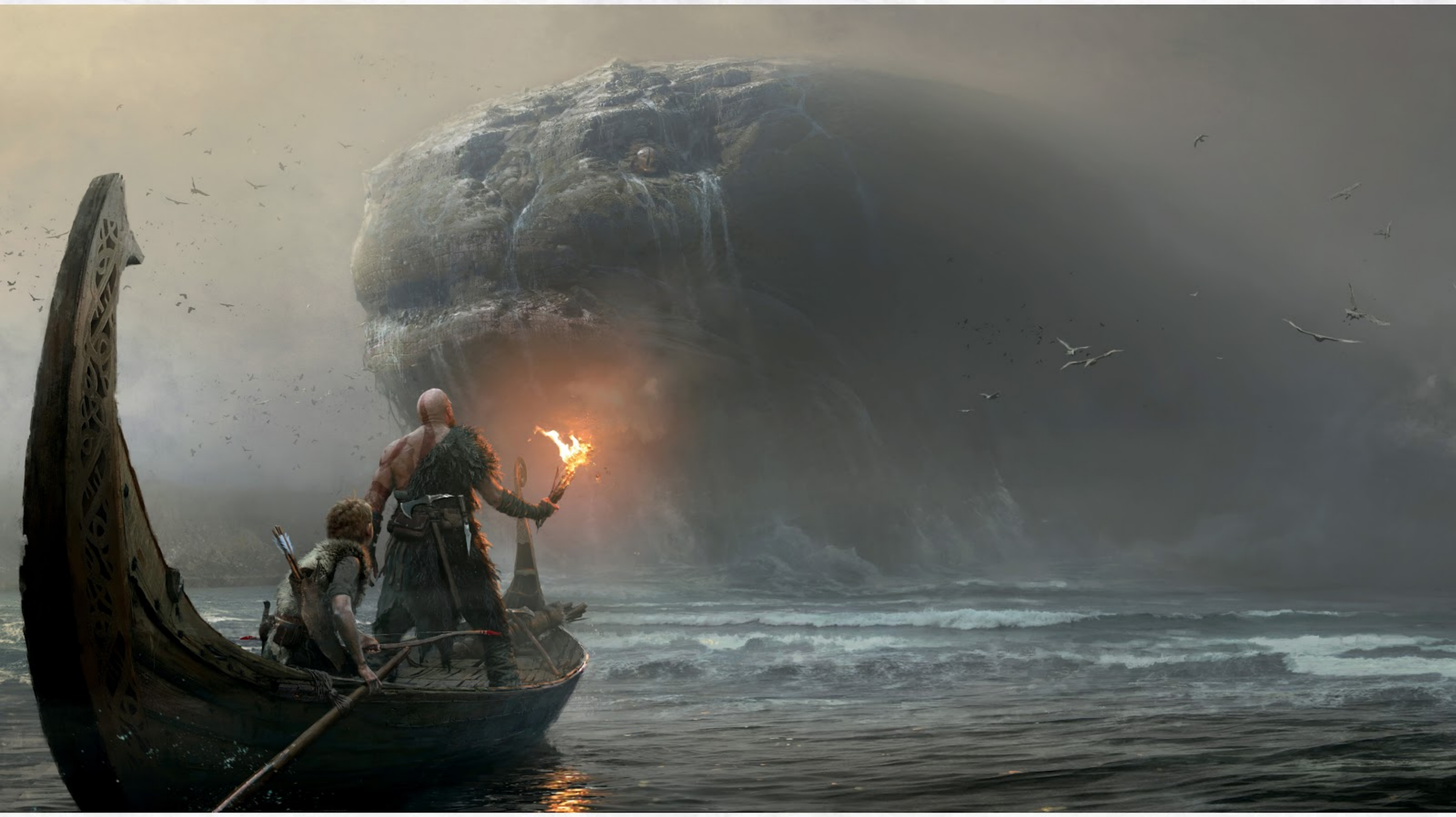
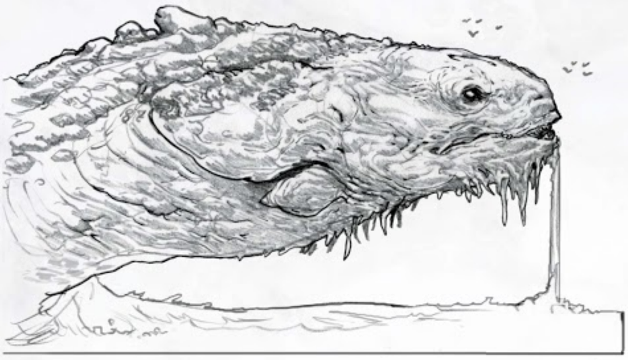
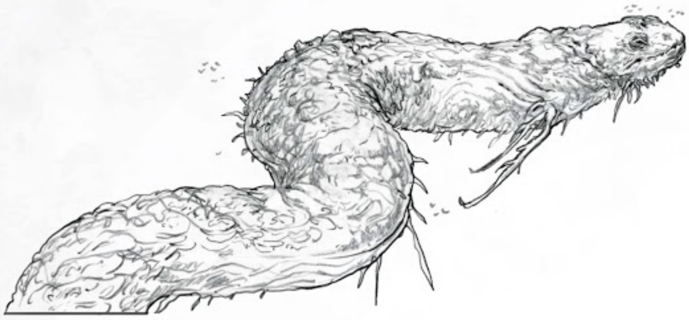
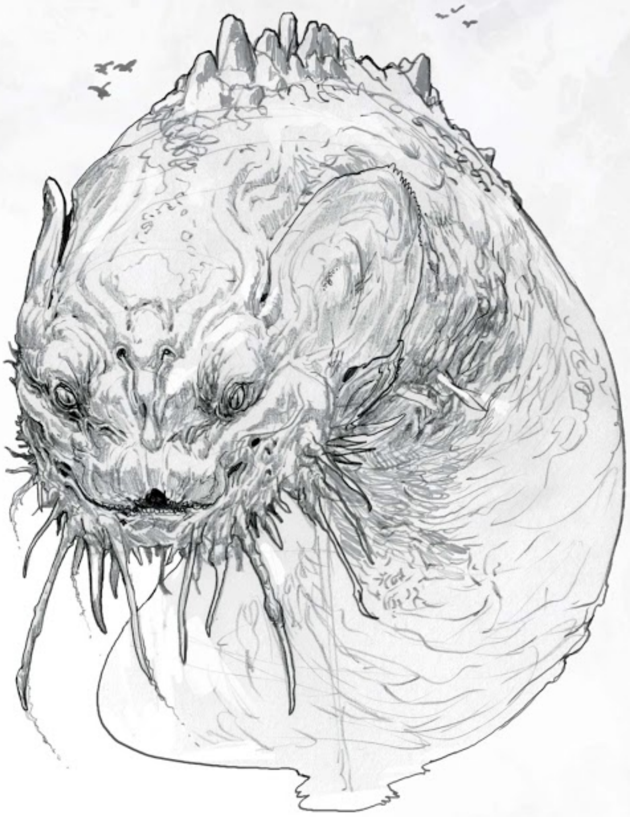


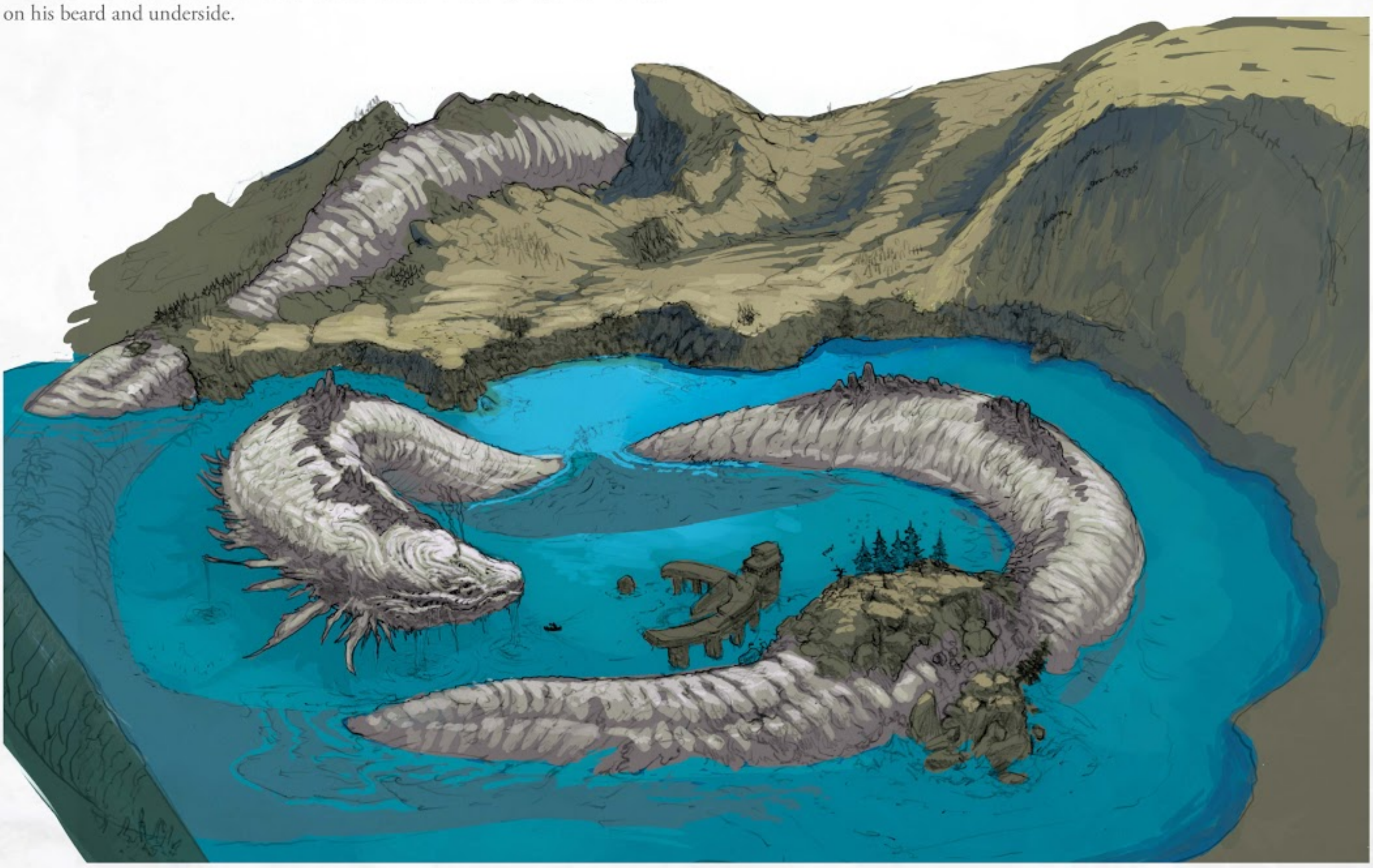
Artist: José Cabrera





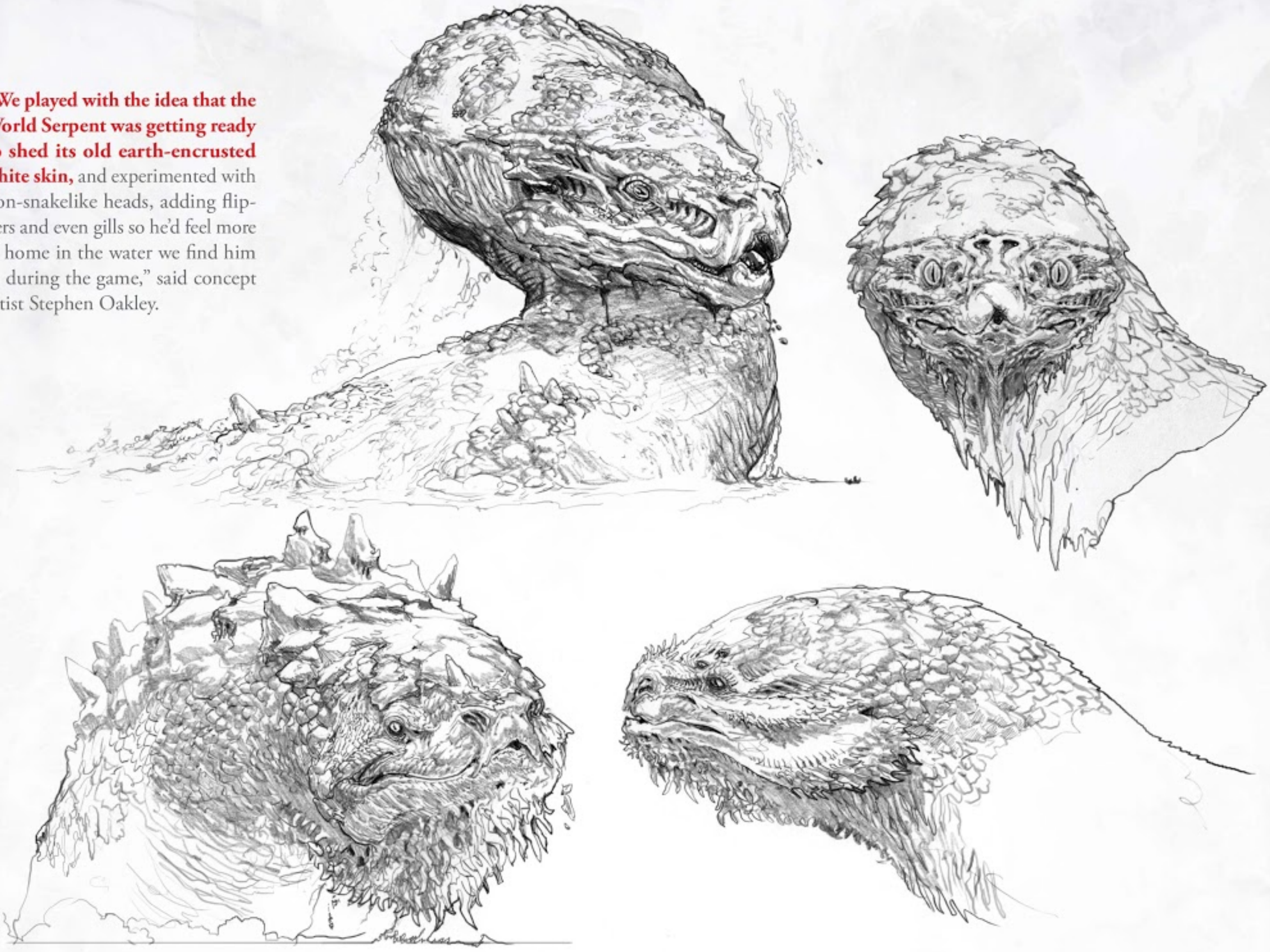


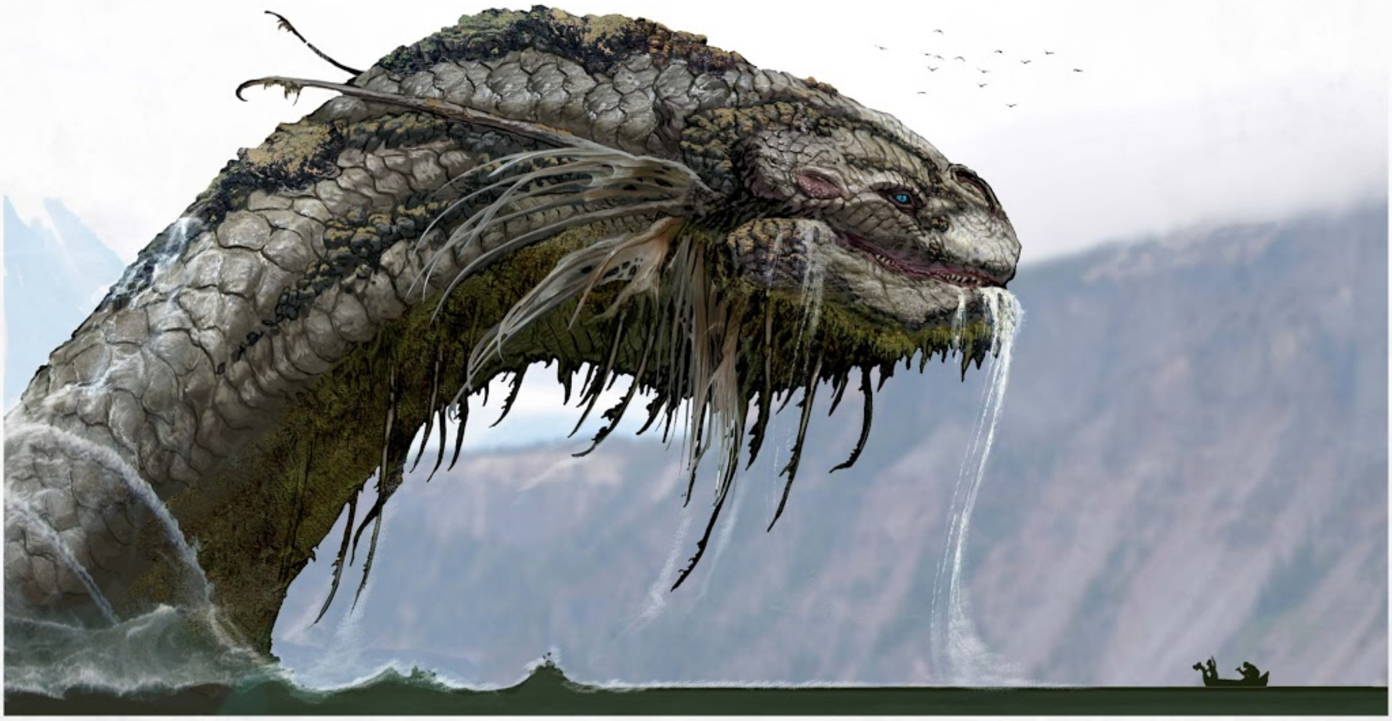
"The World Serpent was a fun challenge," said concept artist Stephen Oakley. "Turning a simple snake into an immense, wise, and intimidating character—rather than a simple creature—was an interesting task." Oakley and the team played around with the idea of features like catfish whiskers to endow the Serpent with sage-like quality, but ultimately opted instead for a dangling lake of foliage on his beard and underside.



Exploring designs of the giant World Serpent. Artist: Stephen Oakley

“We played with the idea that the World Serpent was getting ready to shed its old earth-encrusted white skin, and experimented with non-snakelike heads, adding flippers and even gills so he’d feel more at home in the water we find him in during the game,” said concept artist Stephen Oakley.





Artist: Stephen Oakley

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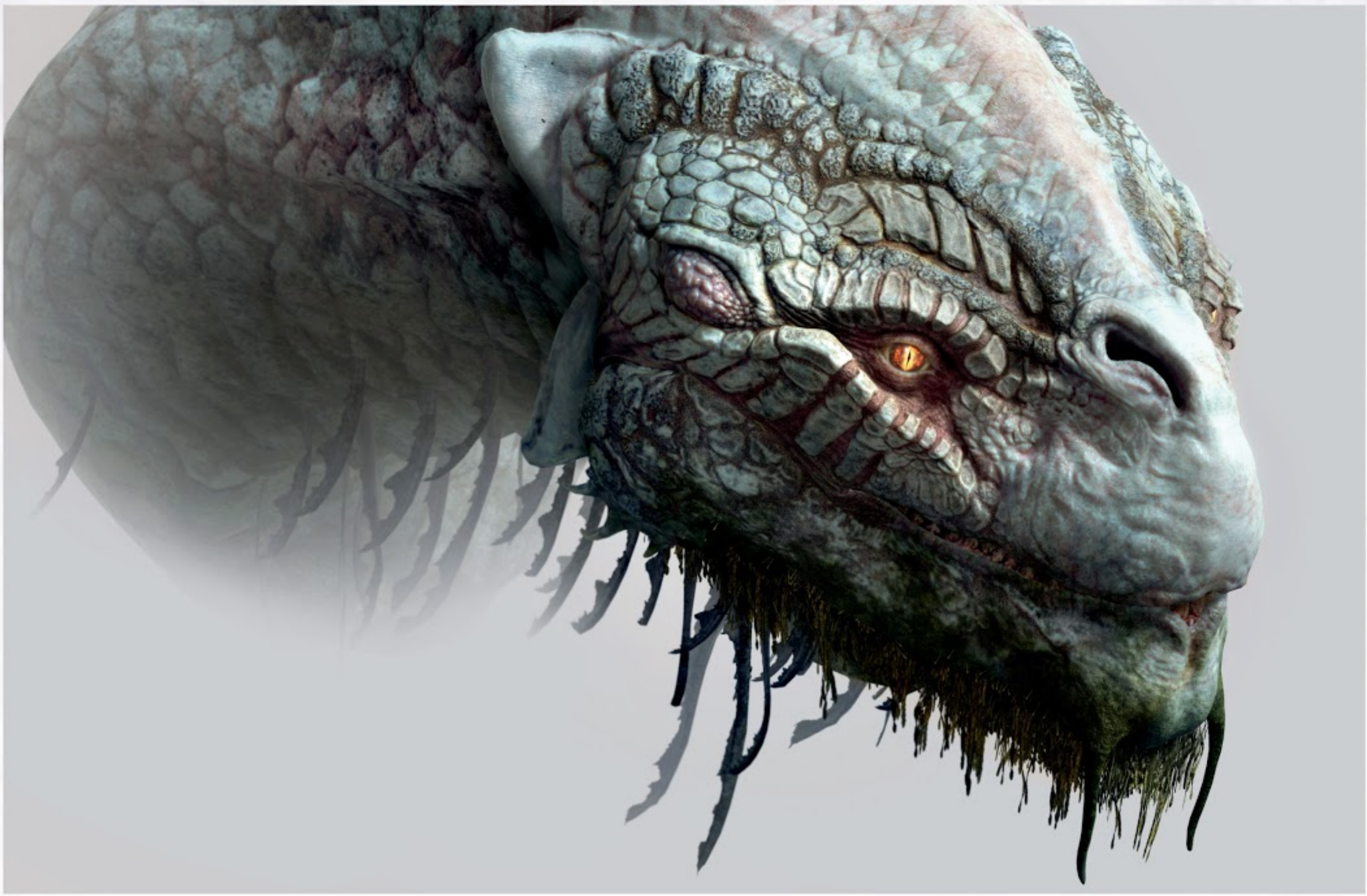
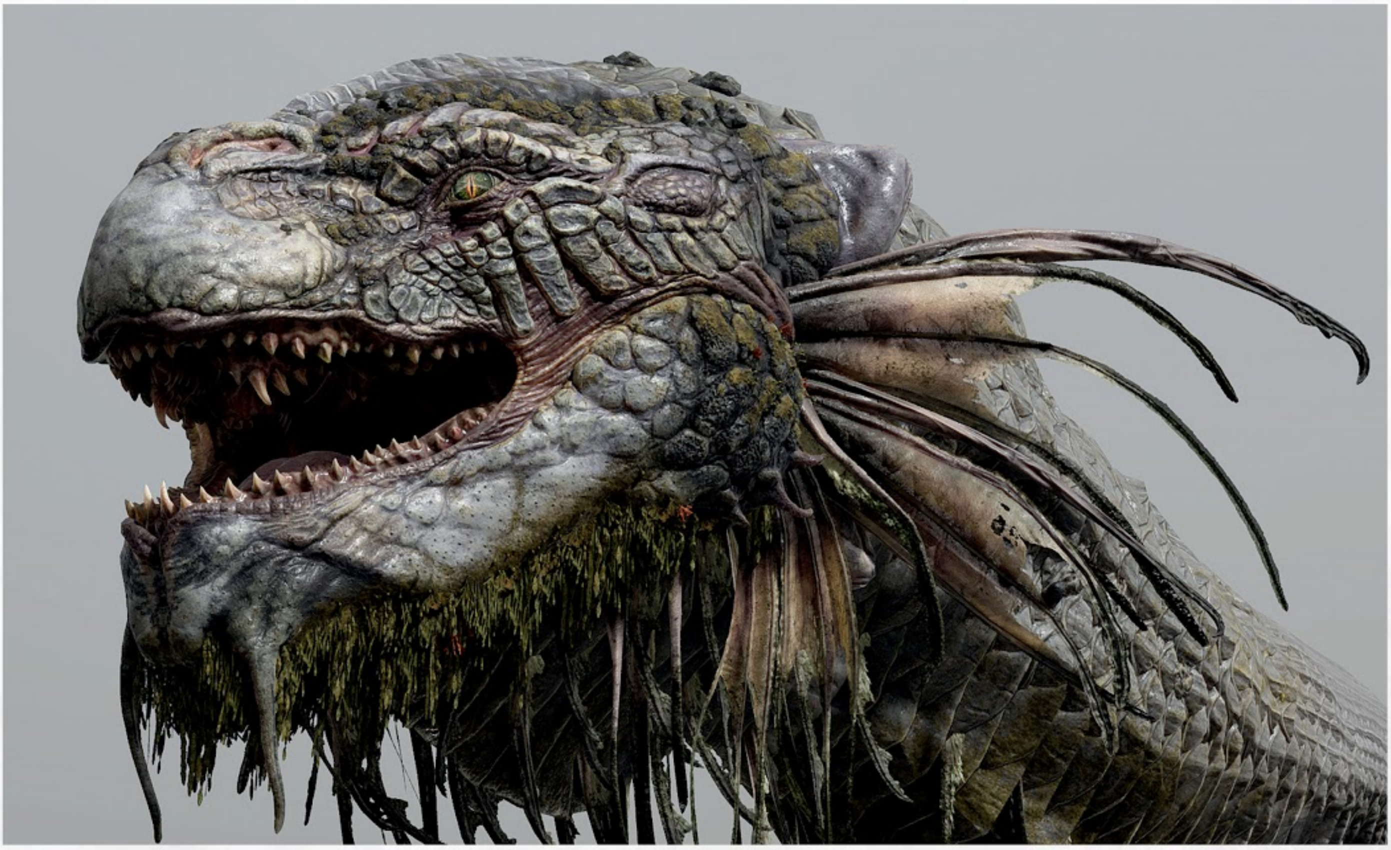
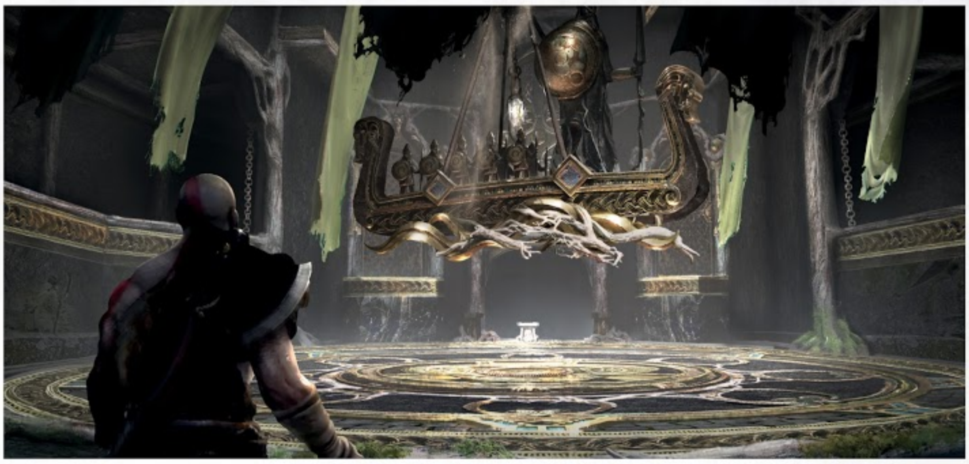


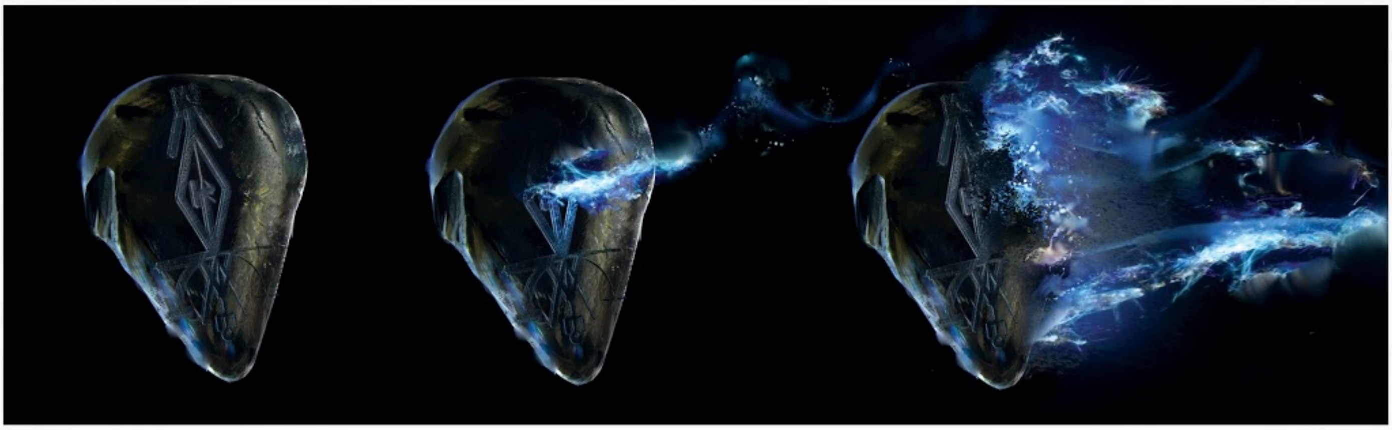


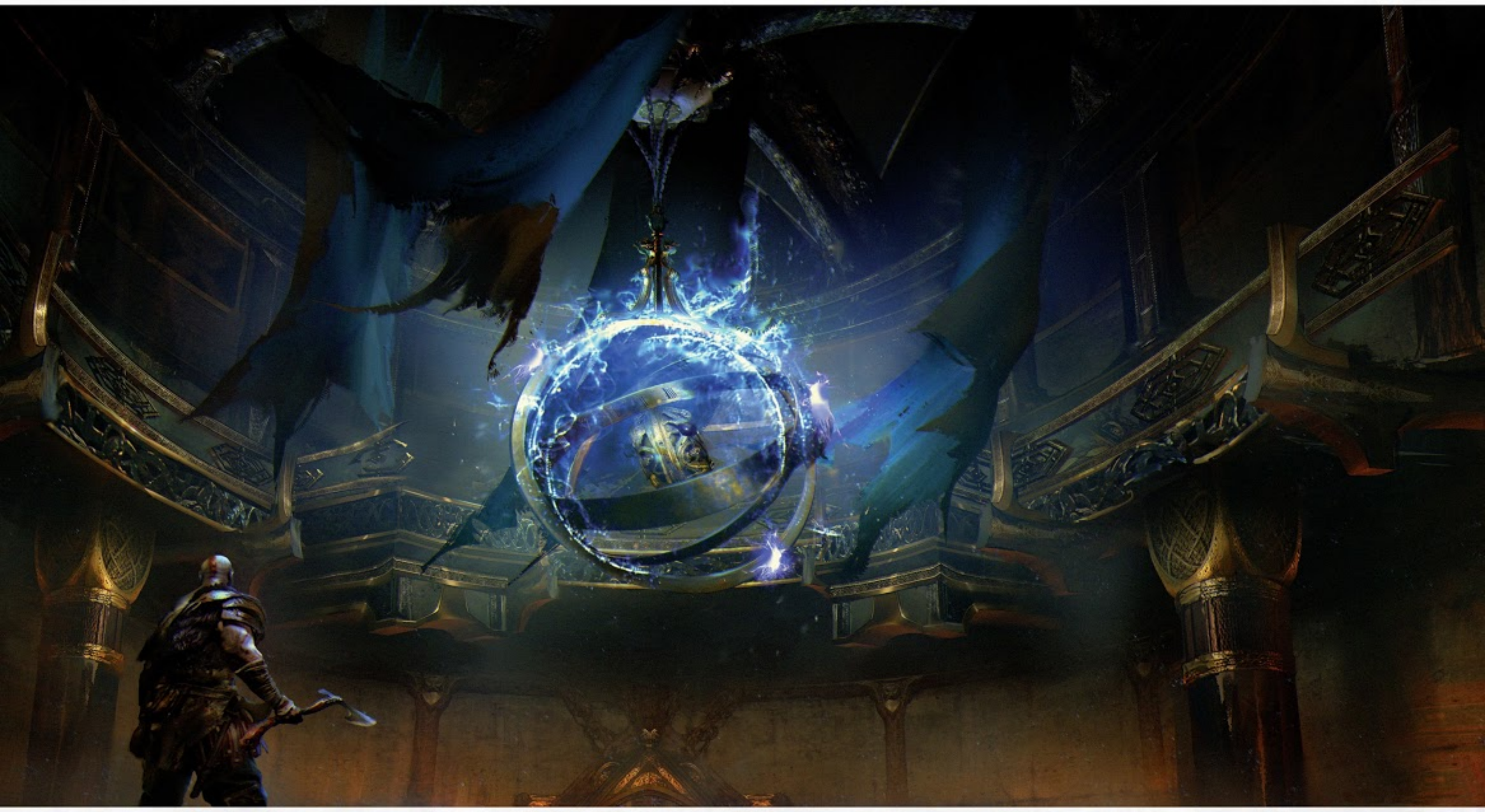
Final look for Jörmungandr. Artists: Rafael Grassetti, Igor Catto, Glauco Longhi

Artists: Rafael Grassetti, Axel Grossman, Igor Catto, Glauco Longhi

The puzzle in the Lake of Nine's water trap room presented an interesting logistical challenge. The visual development department is often given an outline by the design department that specifies what to develop. In the case of the water trap room, the only context provided said that Týr had set a trap for other gods who had come to steal his treasures. The trap could only be released through the cooperation of two otherwise extremely uncooperative gods.







The rune stone vault. Artists: Jin Kim (top); Abe Taraky

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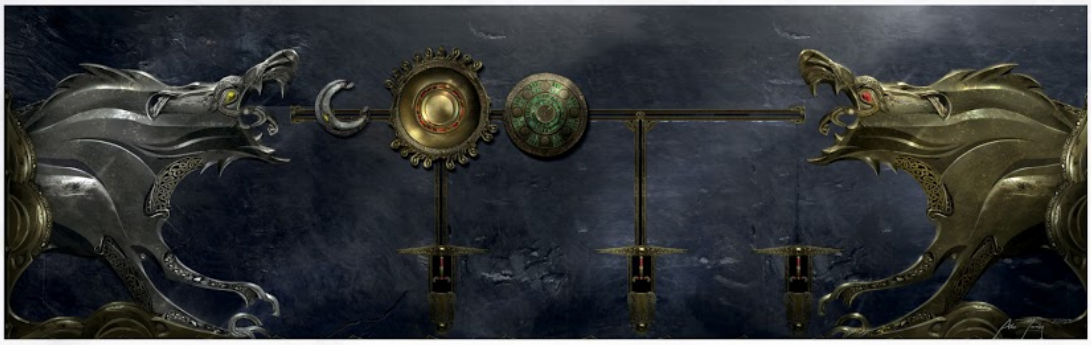
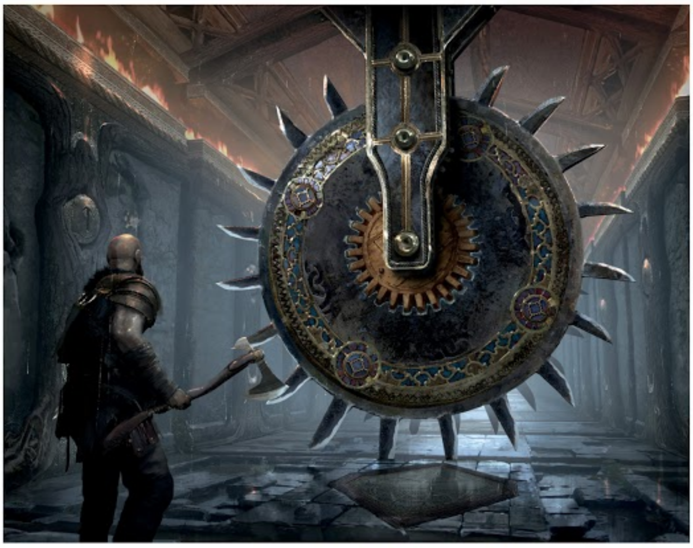
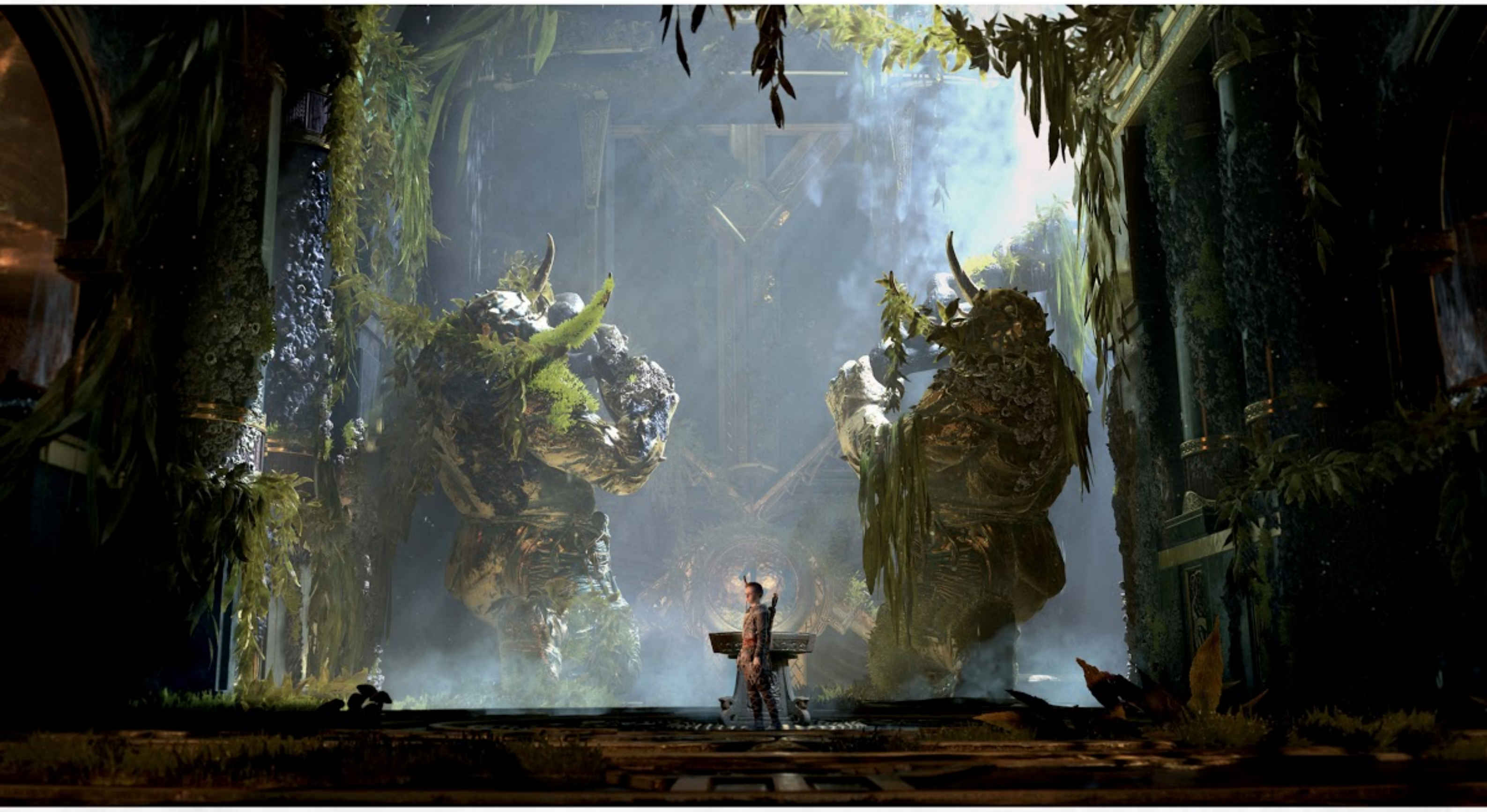




This was a rare chance for the visual development team to take the primitive 3-D base and run with it in nearly any direction. Ultimately, it was determined that the three moving central parts could fit well with the story of Sköll and Hati. In Norse mythology, there are two wolves—"Sköll," meaning "one who mocks," and "Hati," meaning "one who hates"—who endlessly pursue the sun and moon.

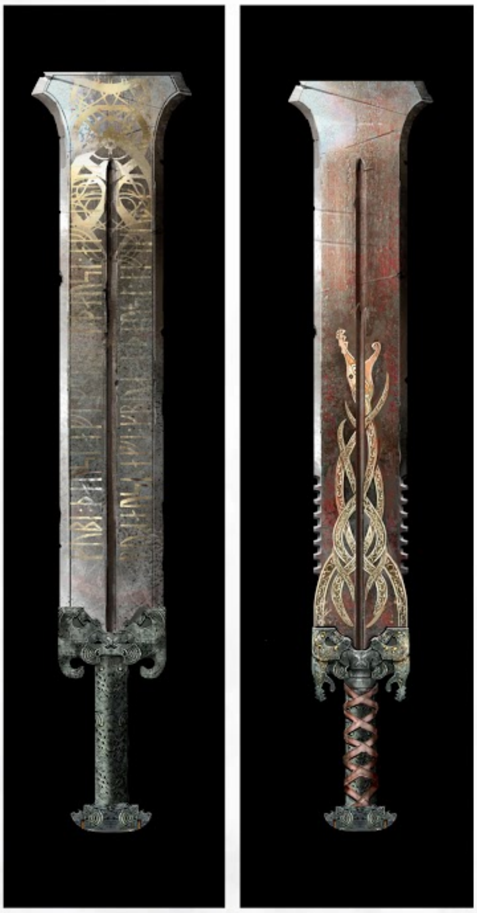
Their ultimate goal is to devour these stars and incite the beginning of Ragnarok. This narrative worked to contextualize aspects of game play with the larger story.

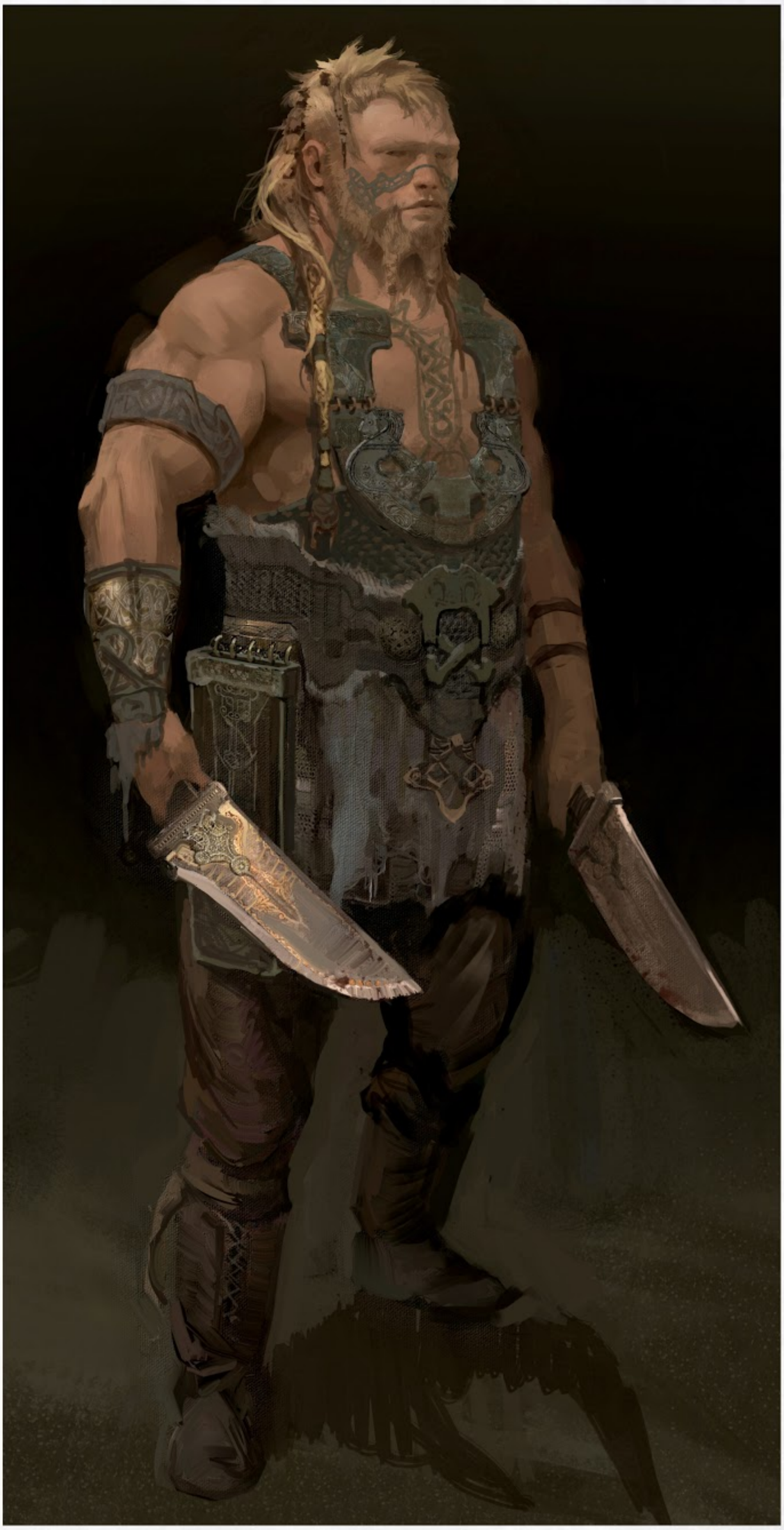


The Traps of Týr. Artists: Abe Taraky (top); Luke Berliner (middle left); Jin Kim (middle right); Kevin Quinn, Nate Stephens (bottom)

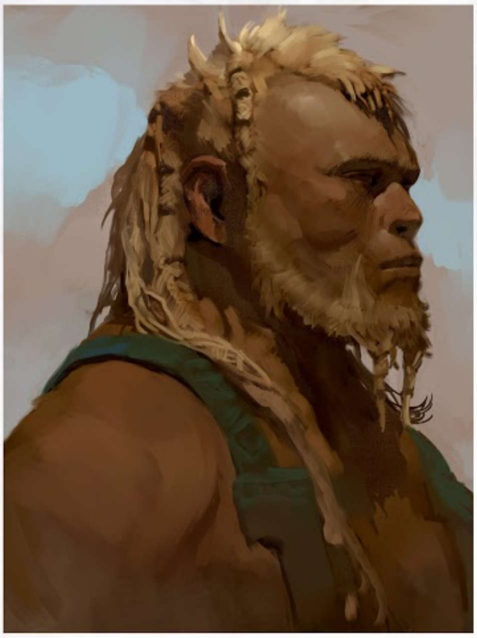
Magni and Modi are the sons of Thor. Unlike the Gods of Olympus, the Norse Gods have an unrefined, or less ornate, look while still retaining a brutal nature about them. We wanted the designs of their faces and costumes to have imperfections and imply a history to the characters. This can be seen in the designs of Magni and Modi; even the ornate parts of their costumes are banged up and covered in dirt and grime.

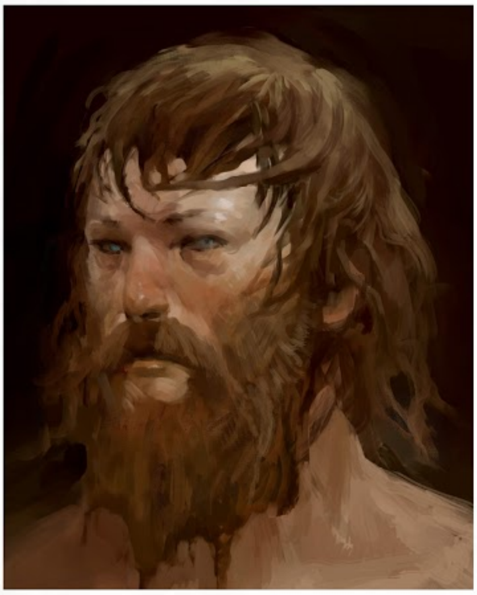
Living in the shadow of their father's deeds, Magni and Modi are always trying to measure up to him. While they may not be as powerful as their father, they still possess some aspects of his abilities. When paired together in combat, their combined might causes complete destruction.

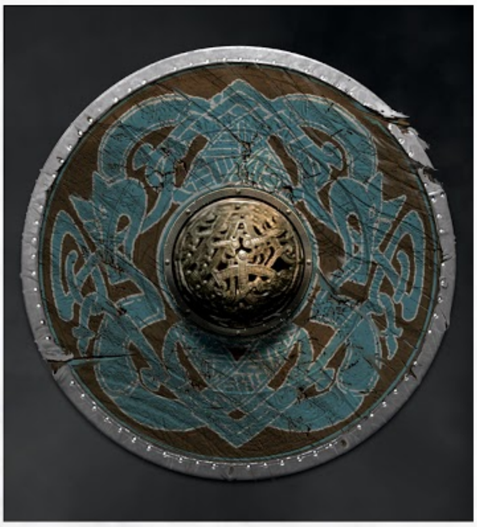


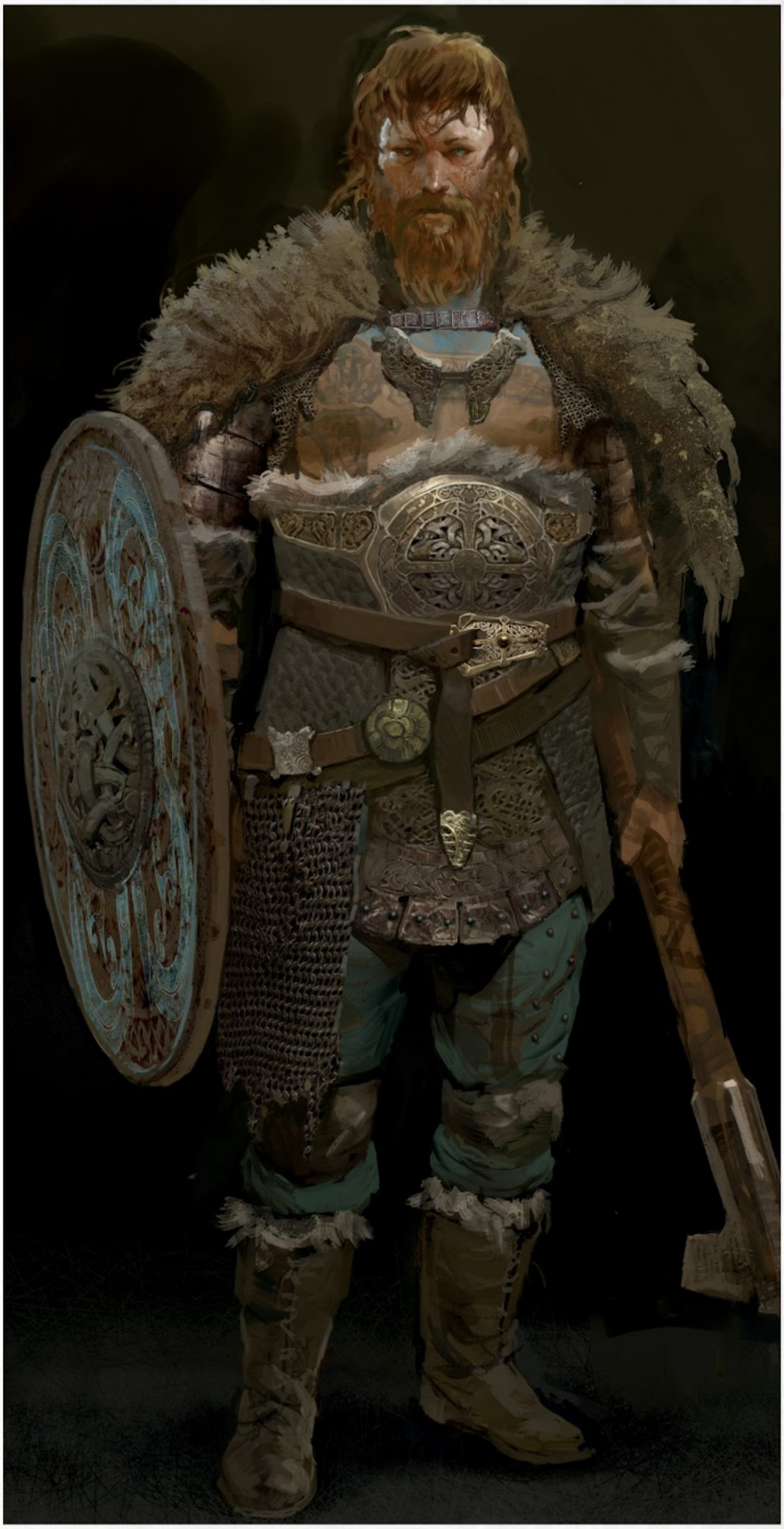


Magni and Modi, the sons of Thor. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (bottom left); Vance Kovacs (right)

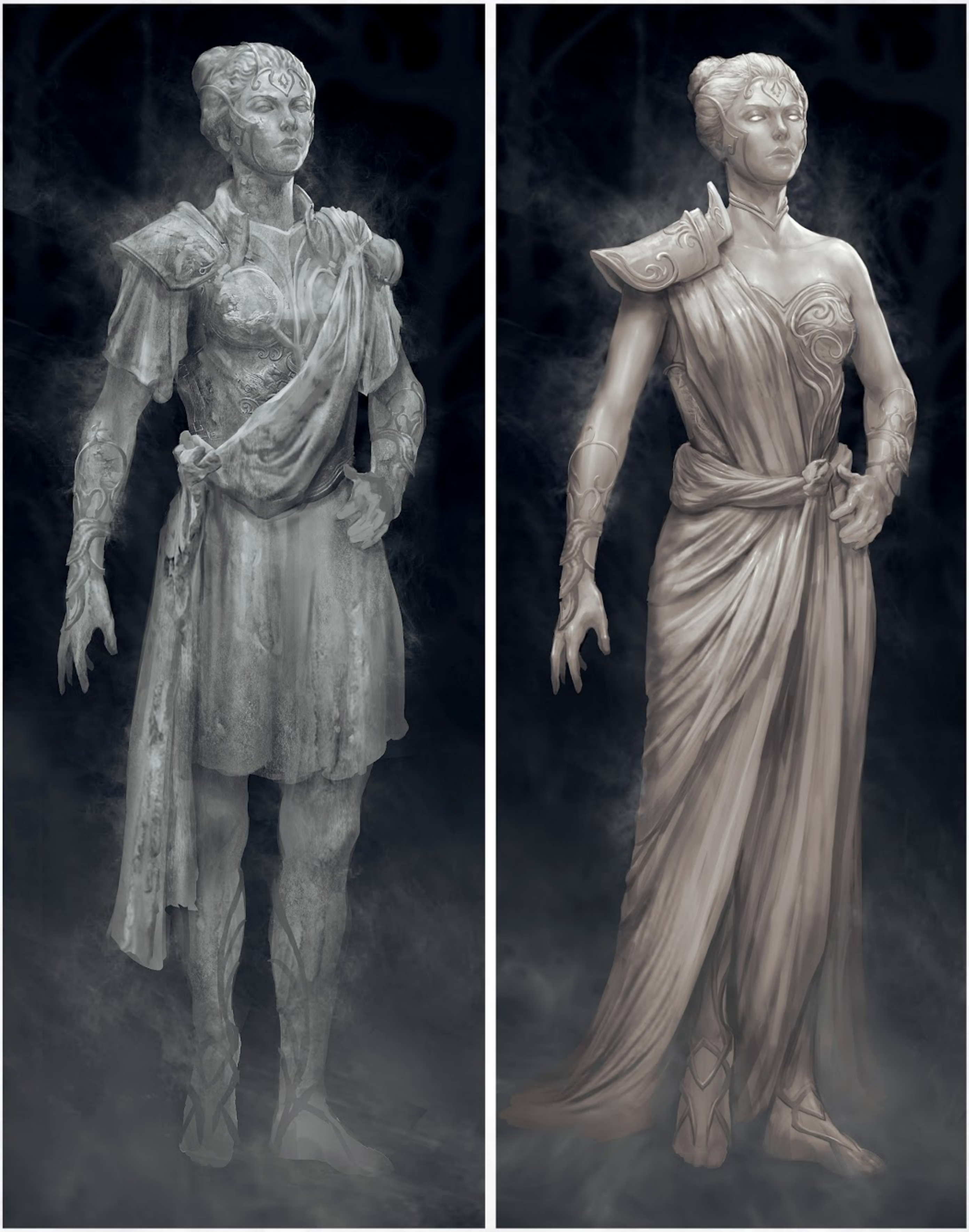




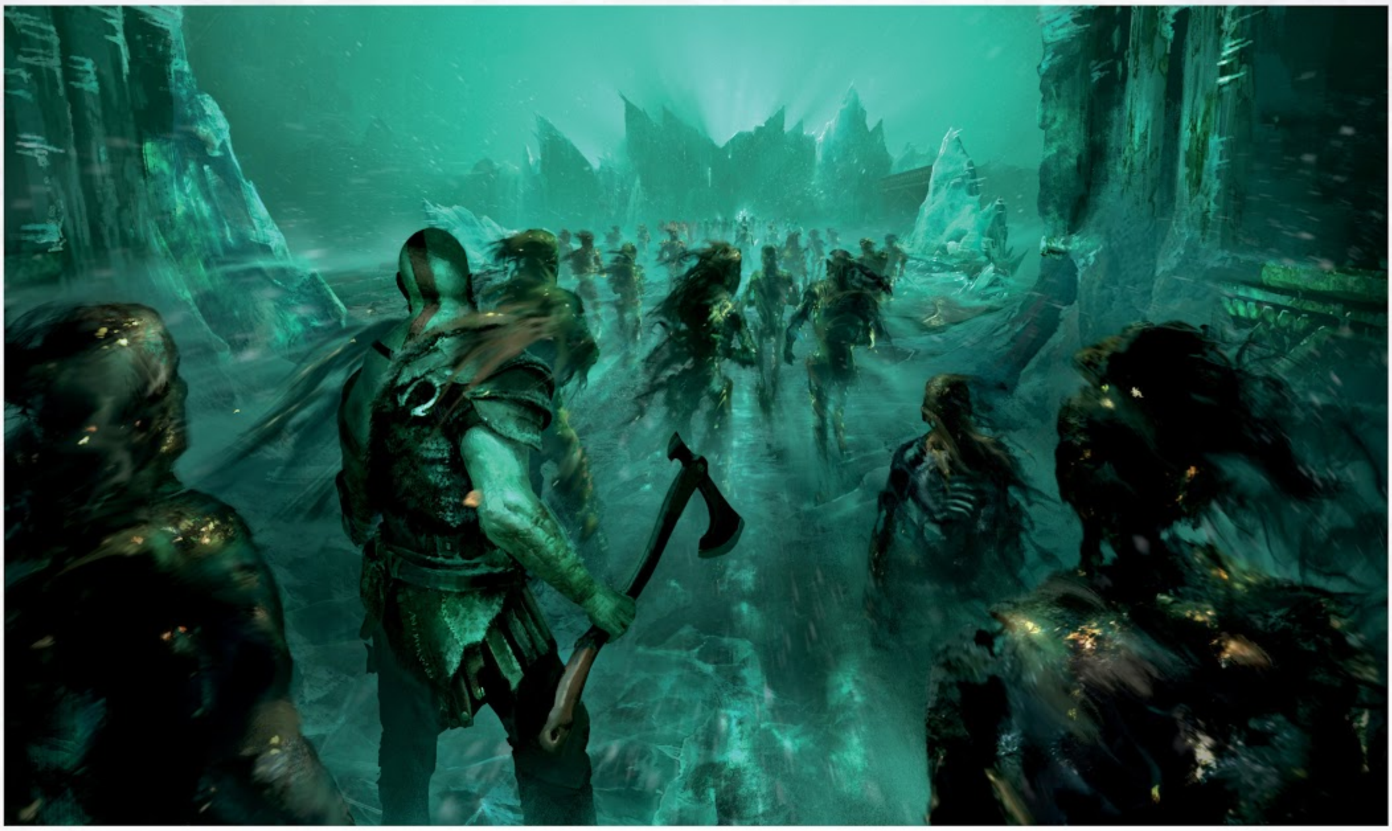


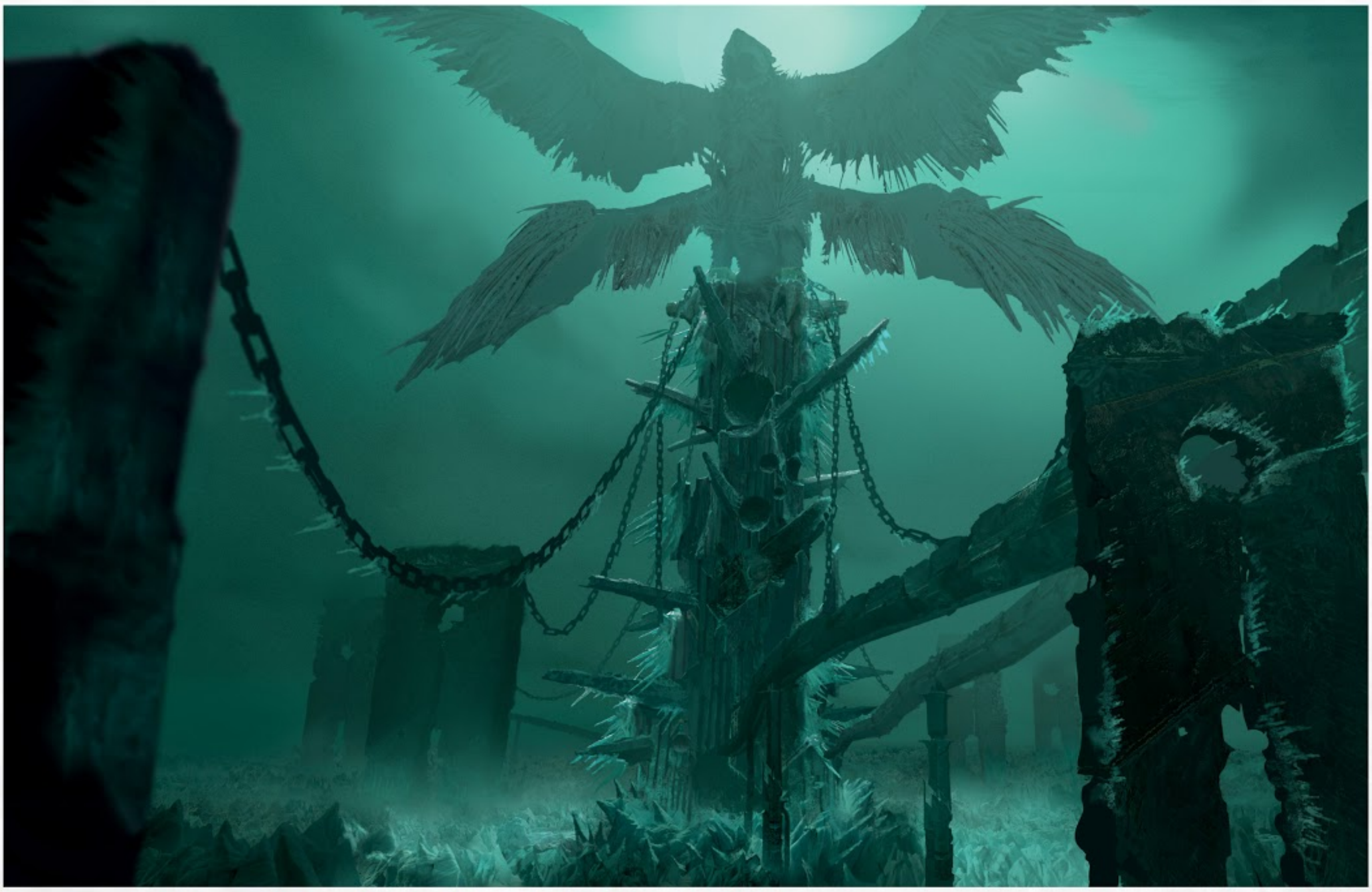


Artists: Joe Kennedy (bottom left); Vance Kovacs

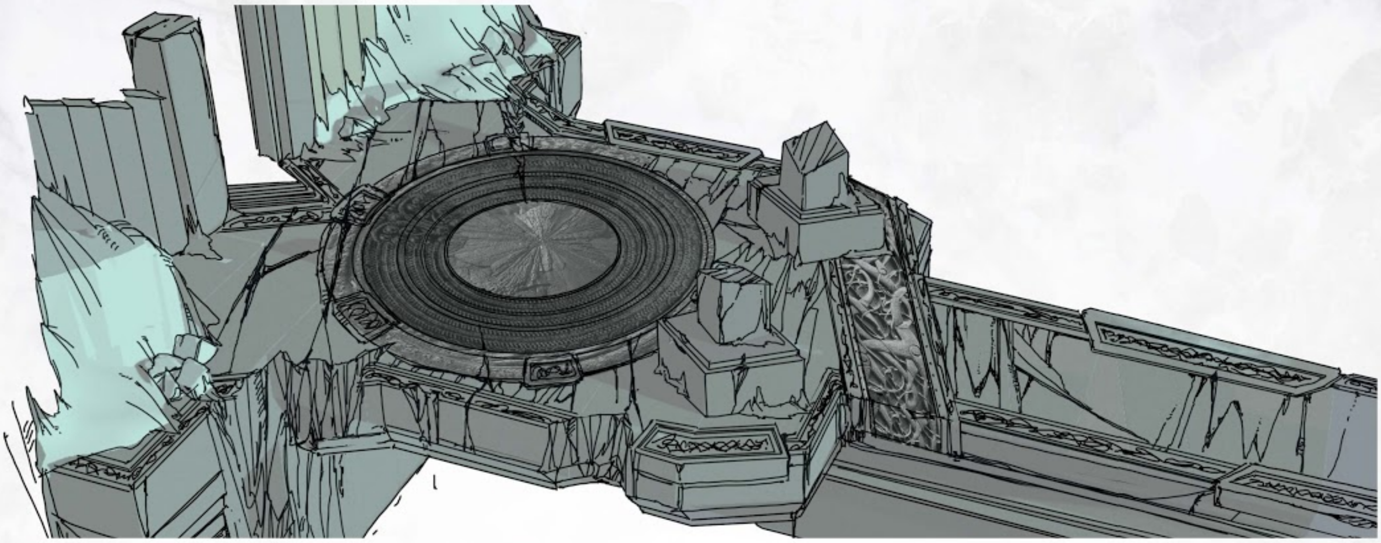


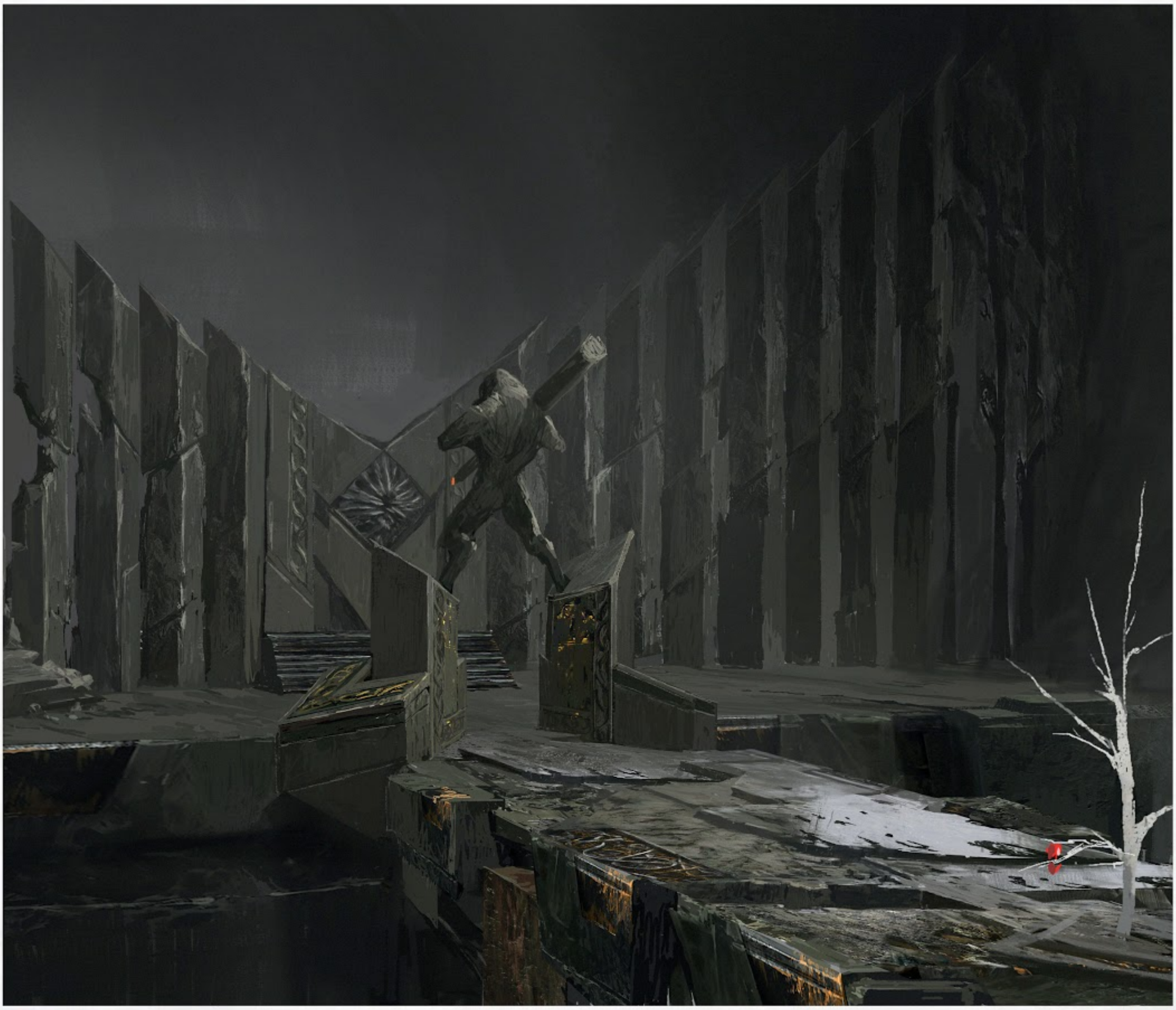
An inescapable past. Artist: Yefim Kligerman (this page, opposite)



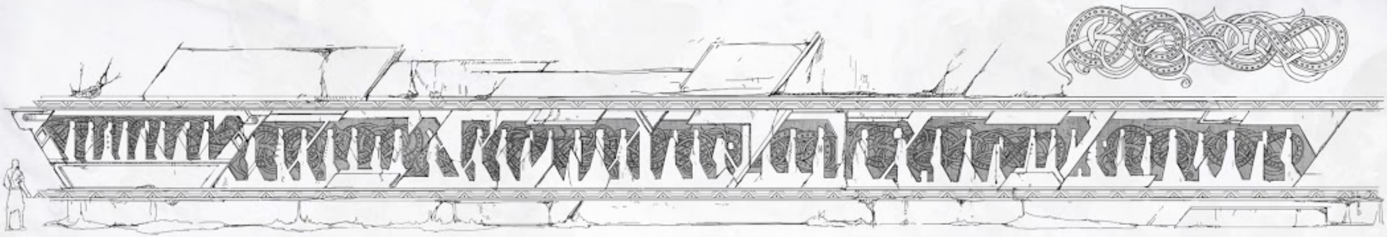


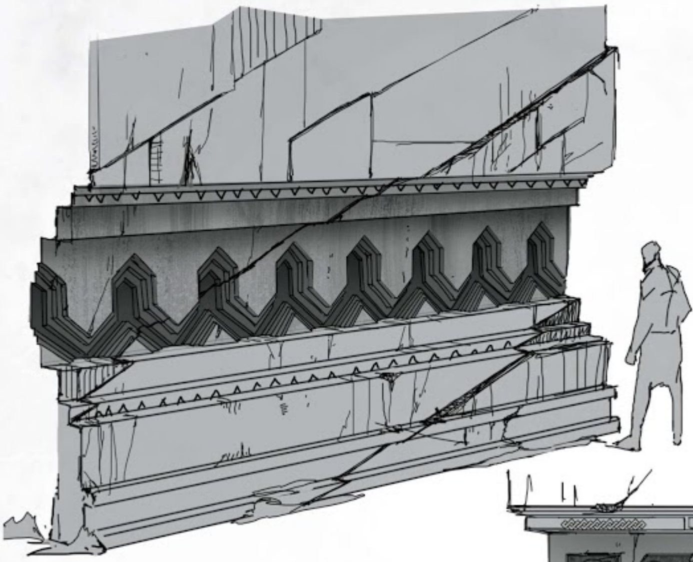
The team wanted the player to feel utter despair as they watched the dead come into Helheim, shuffling and shivering down the bridge as Kratos pushes himself through the stinging squall, winding his way around the entrance. Here, we see some work exploring these themes. Artist: Jin Kim

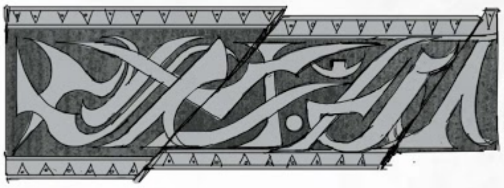


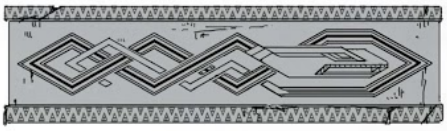


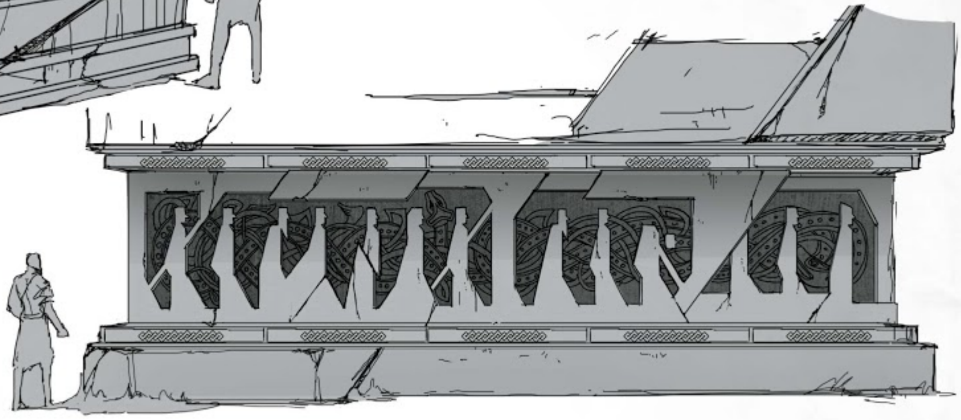
The guarded gate. Artists: Jin Kim (top); Annis Naeem (bottom)



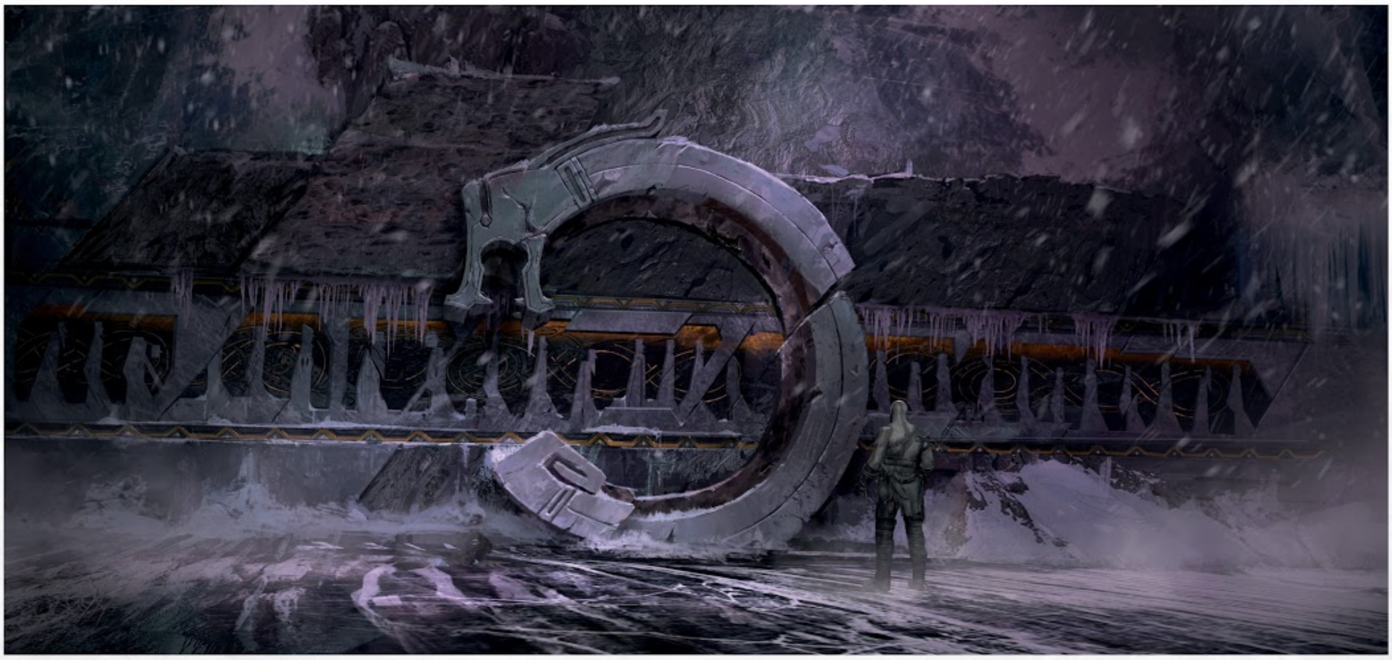




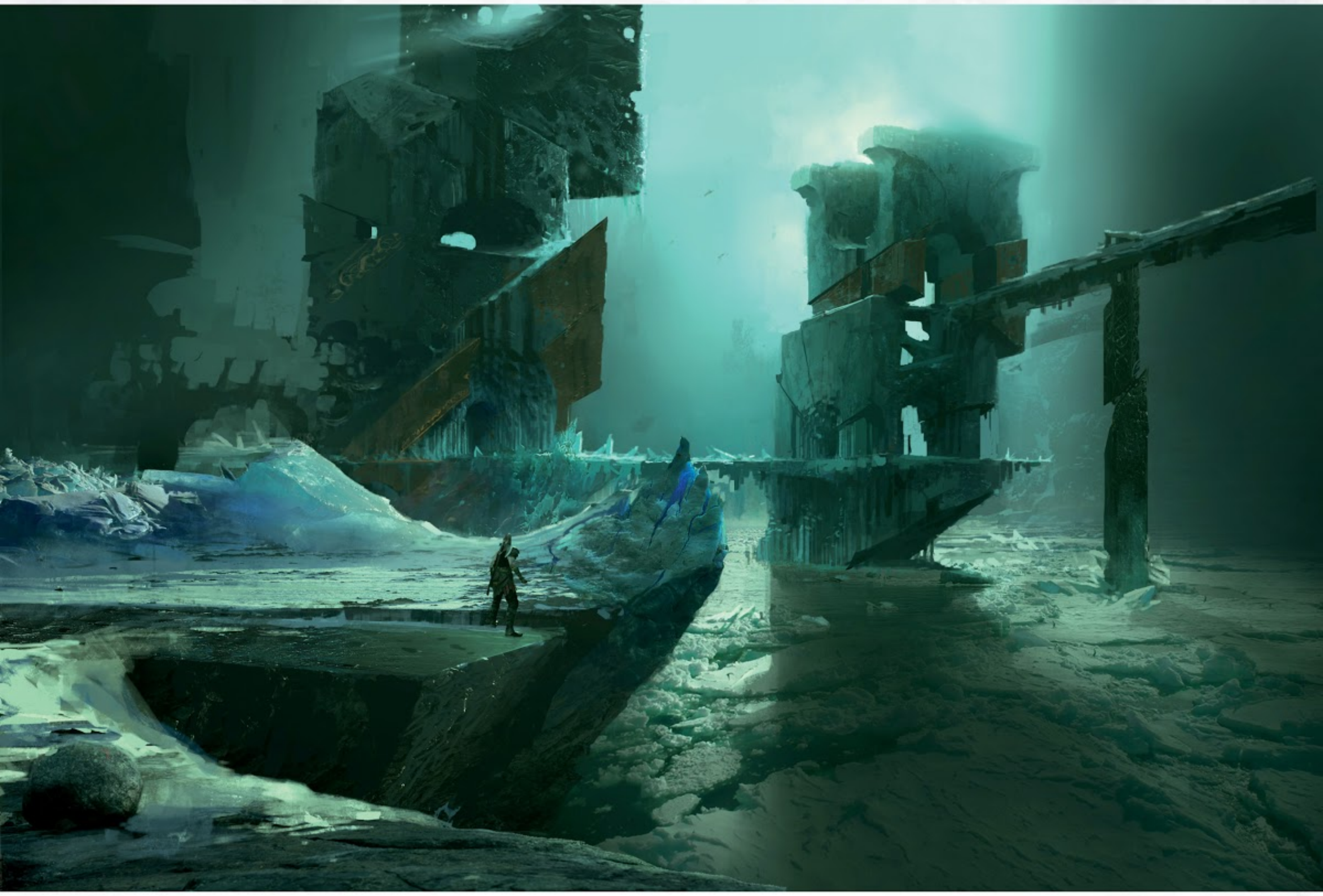


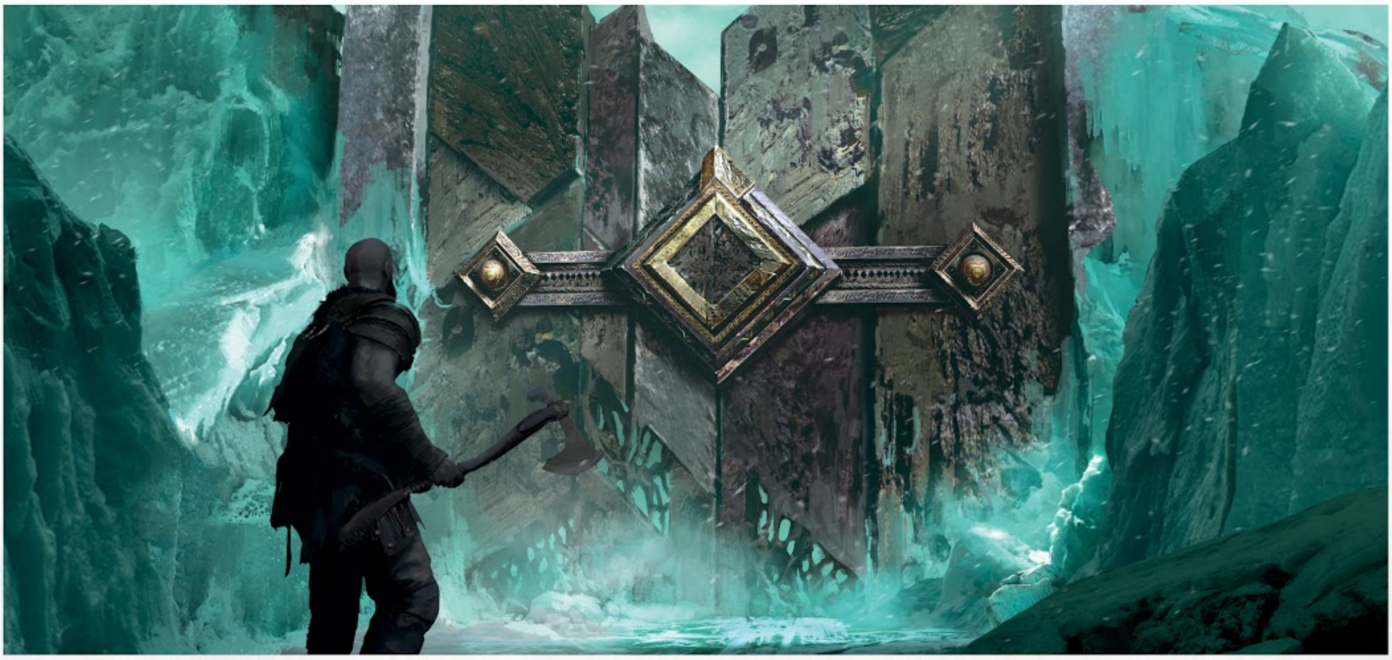


Artist Jin Kim explored the aesthetic concept of the dead walking across the bridge—an idea that was, in fact, a holdover idea from Álfheim, but made more sense in this context.



Helheim architecture exploration. Artist: Jin Kim

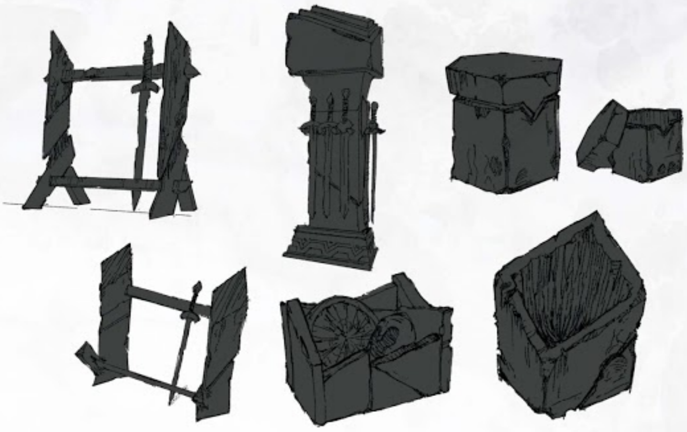


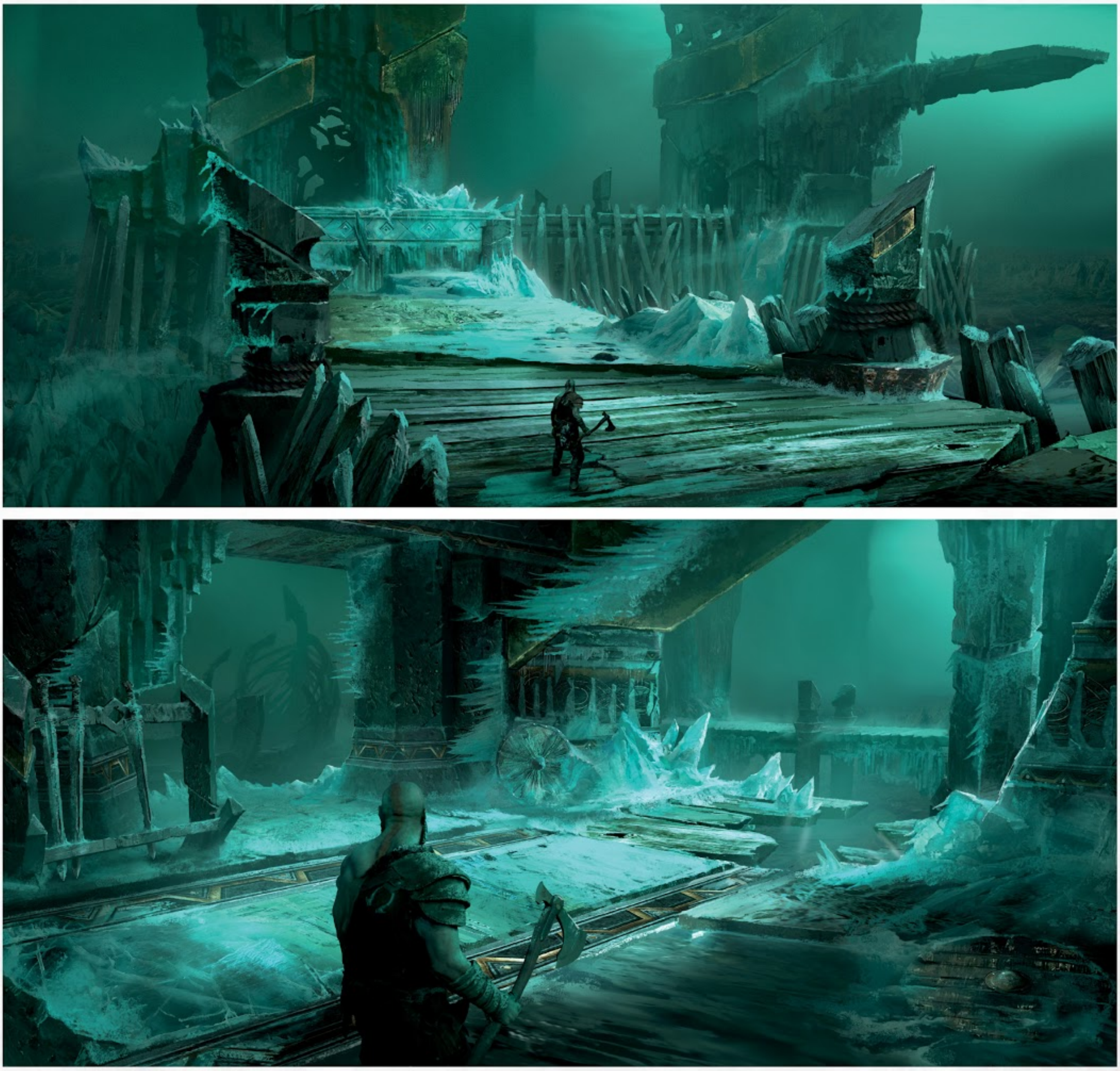


The visual development department spent a great deal of time designing the game's architecture and the trims that adorn it. One longstanding hallmark of the *God of War* games are the generous proportions, with lots of push and pull between forms. Artists: Jin Kim (bottom); José Cabrera (top)

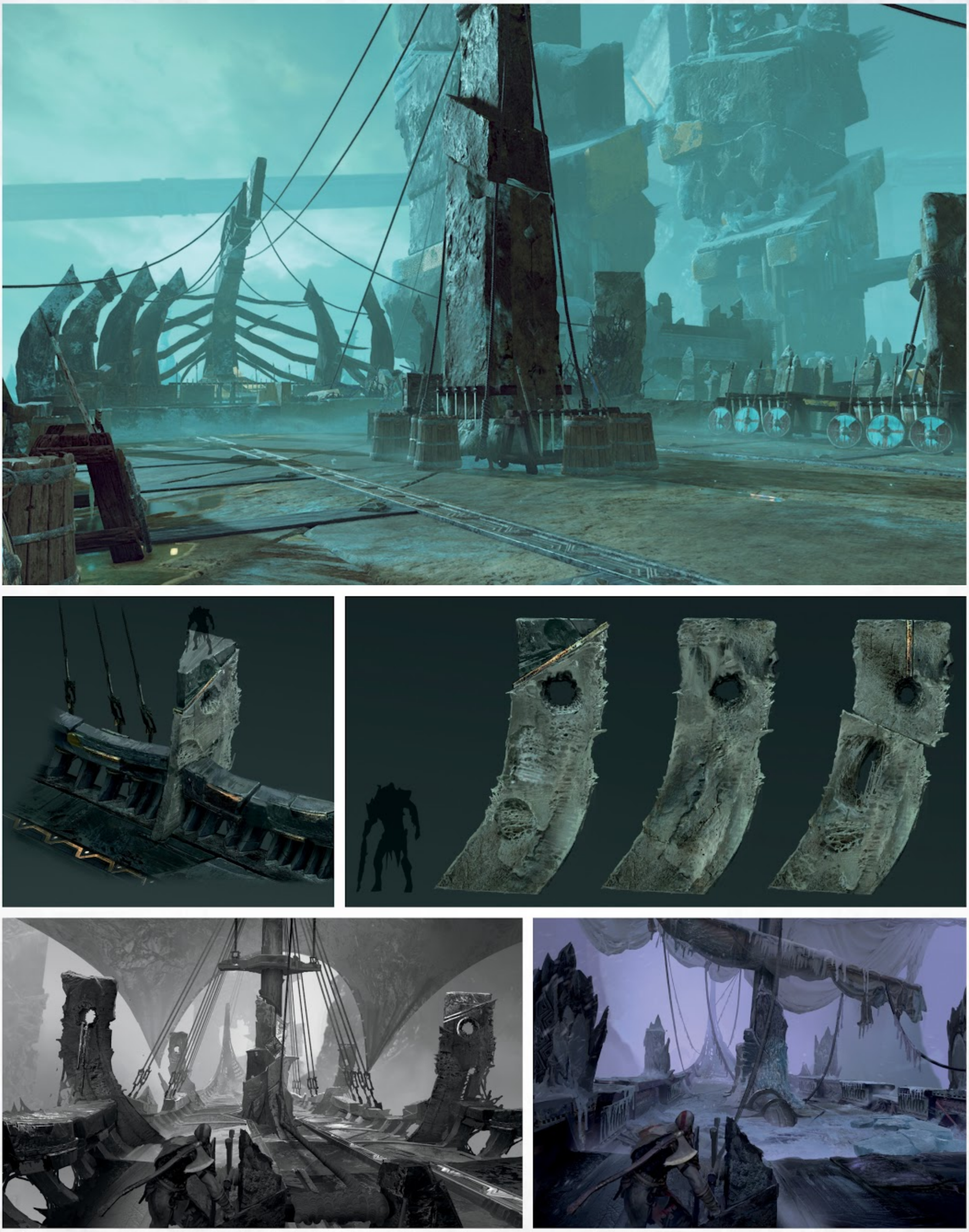
The small ships of Helheim are mainly used to ferry the dead where they will be trained and outfitted as soldiers in Hel's army. In Norse mythology, once Ragnarok occurs, this undead army will descend upon Midgard. Cory wanted the player to feel like they were working with Kratos to hack the boat to convert it into a flying ship to escape.

The docks in Helheim feature loads of weapon racks littered about as the soldiers of the dead prepared for Ragnarok. This allowed a closer look at the River of Knives that can first be seen in the vista on the player's entrance into Helheim.



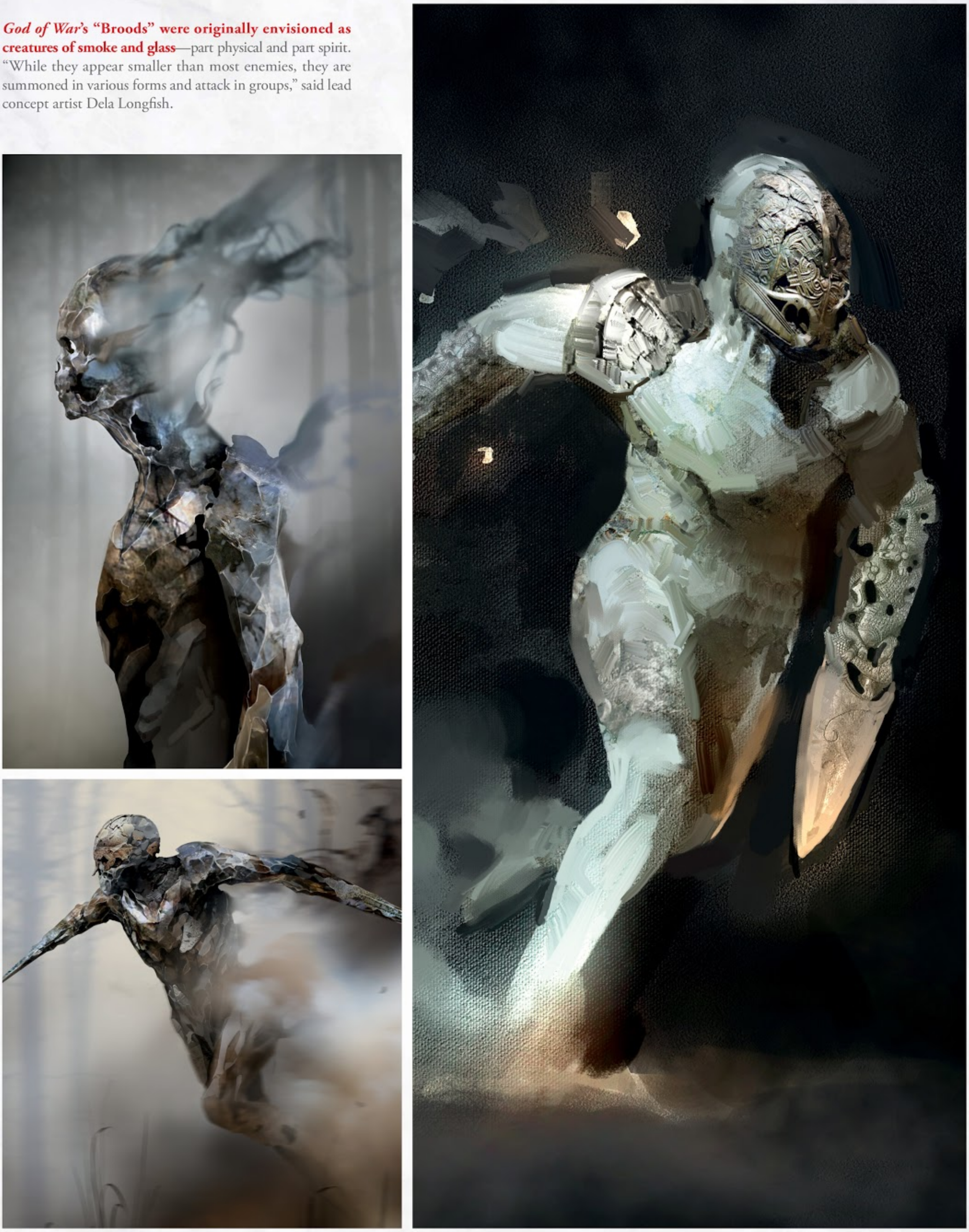


The Docks of Helheim. Artist: Jin Kim



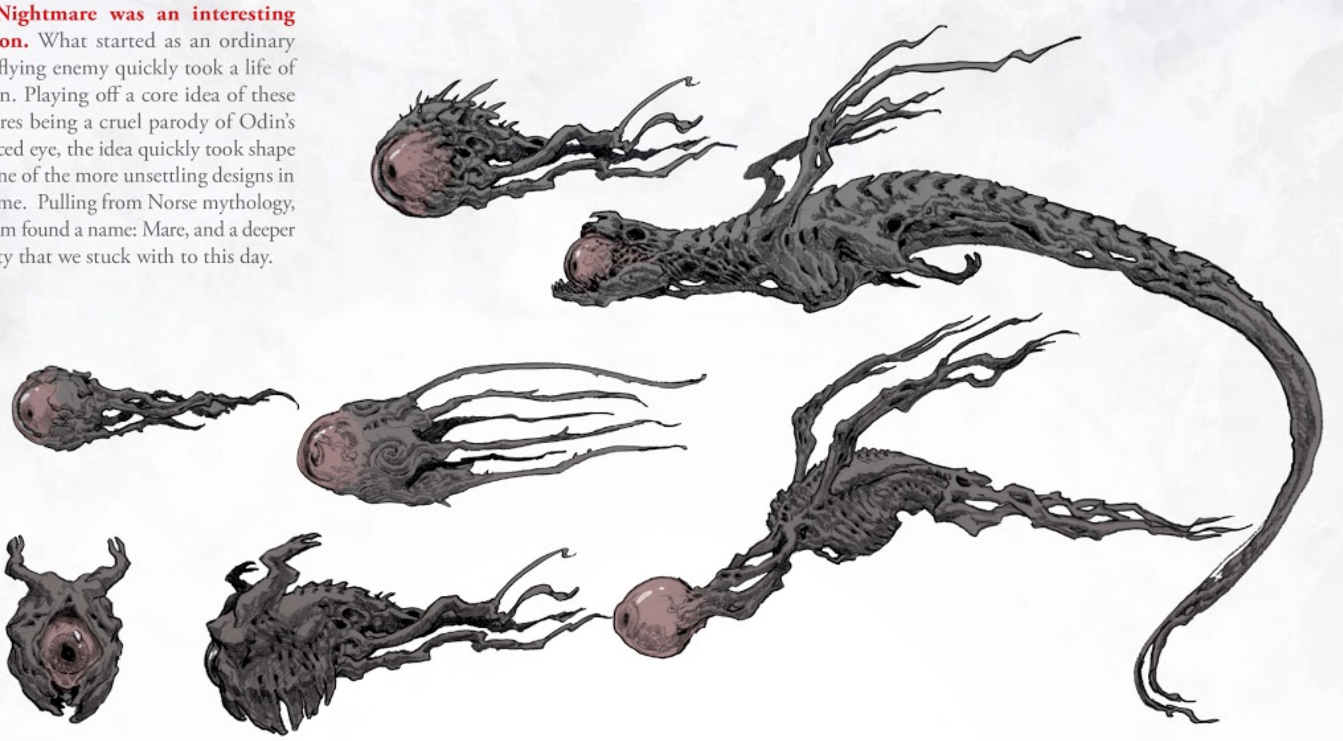
Helheim skiff. Artists: Sukru Gilman, Philip Weisfeld, Nate Stephens (top); Jin Kim

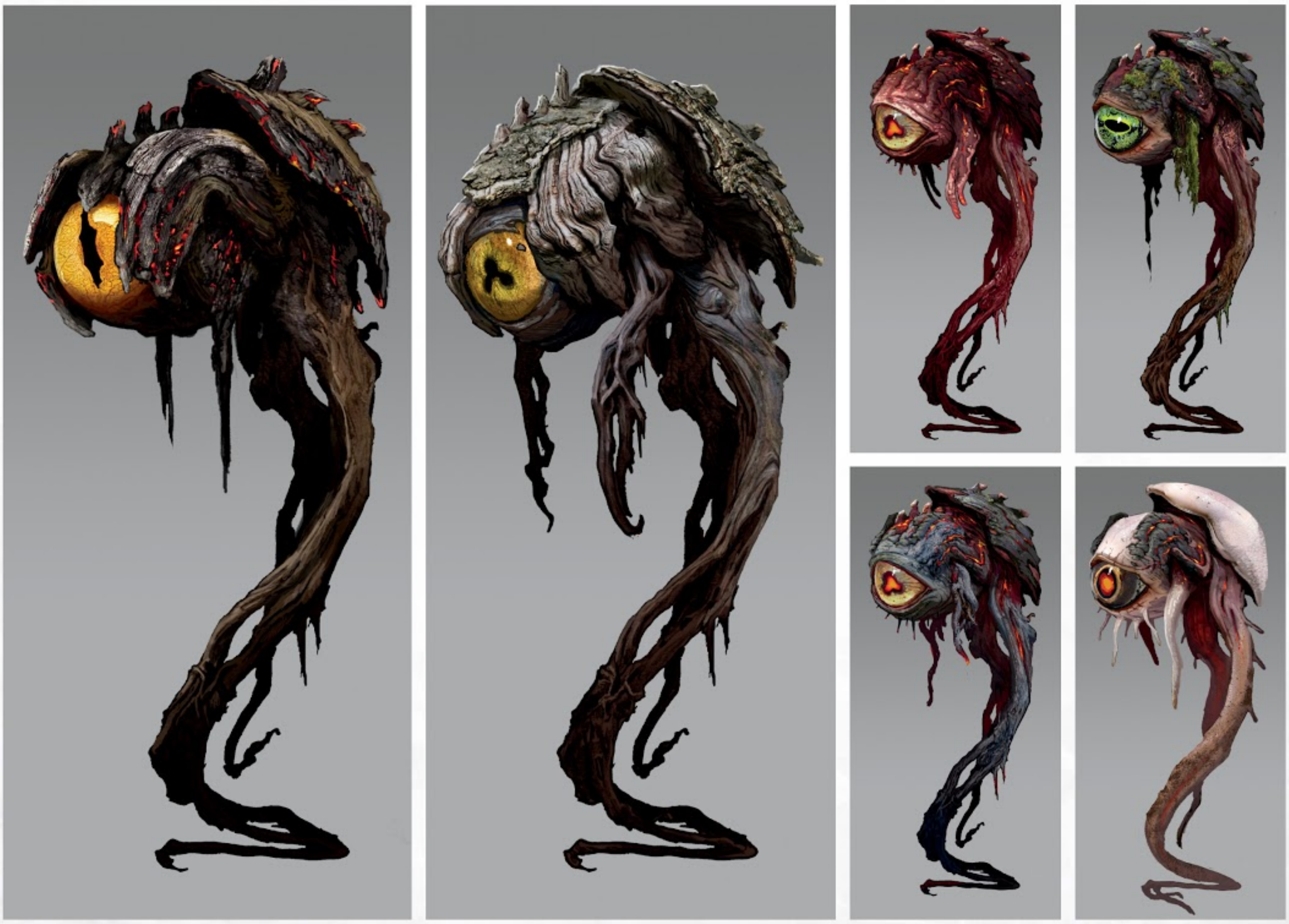
***God of War*'s "Broods" were originally envisioned as creatures of smoke and glass**—part physical and part spirit. "While they appear smaller than most enemies, they are summoned in various forms and attack in groups," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish.



Brood—a character of smoke and glass. Artists: Vance Kovacs (right); Dela Longfish

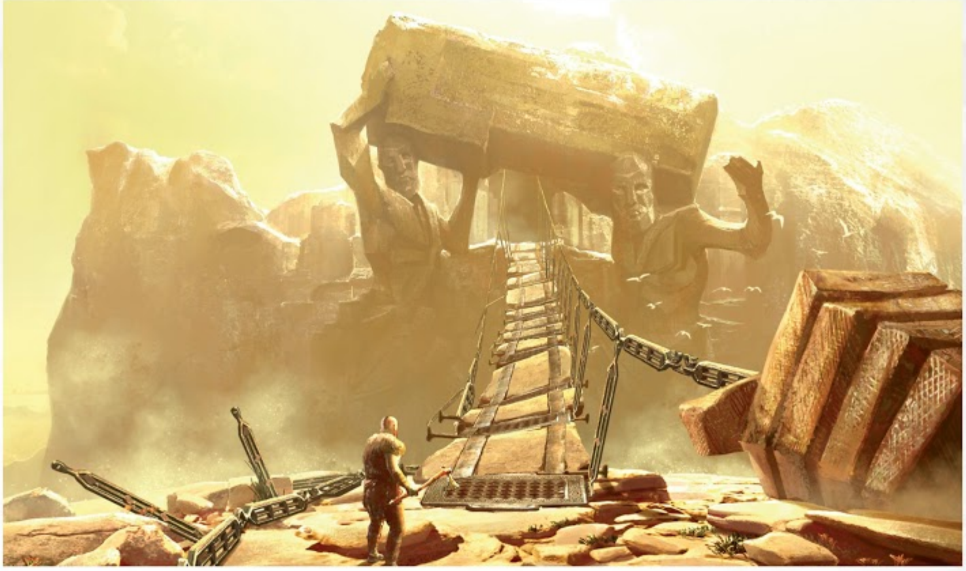
The Nightmare was an interesting creation. What started as an ordinary small flying enemy quickly took a life of its own. Playing off a core idea of these creatures being a cruel parody of Odin's sacrificed eye, the idea quickly took shape into one of the more unsettling designs in the game. Pulling from Norse mythology, the team found a name: Mare, and a deeper identity that we stuck with to this day.

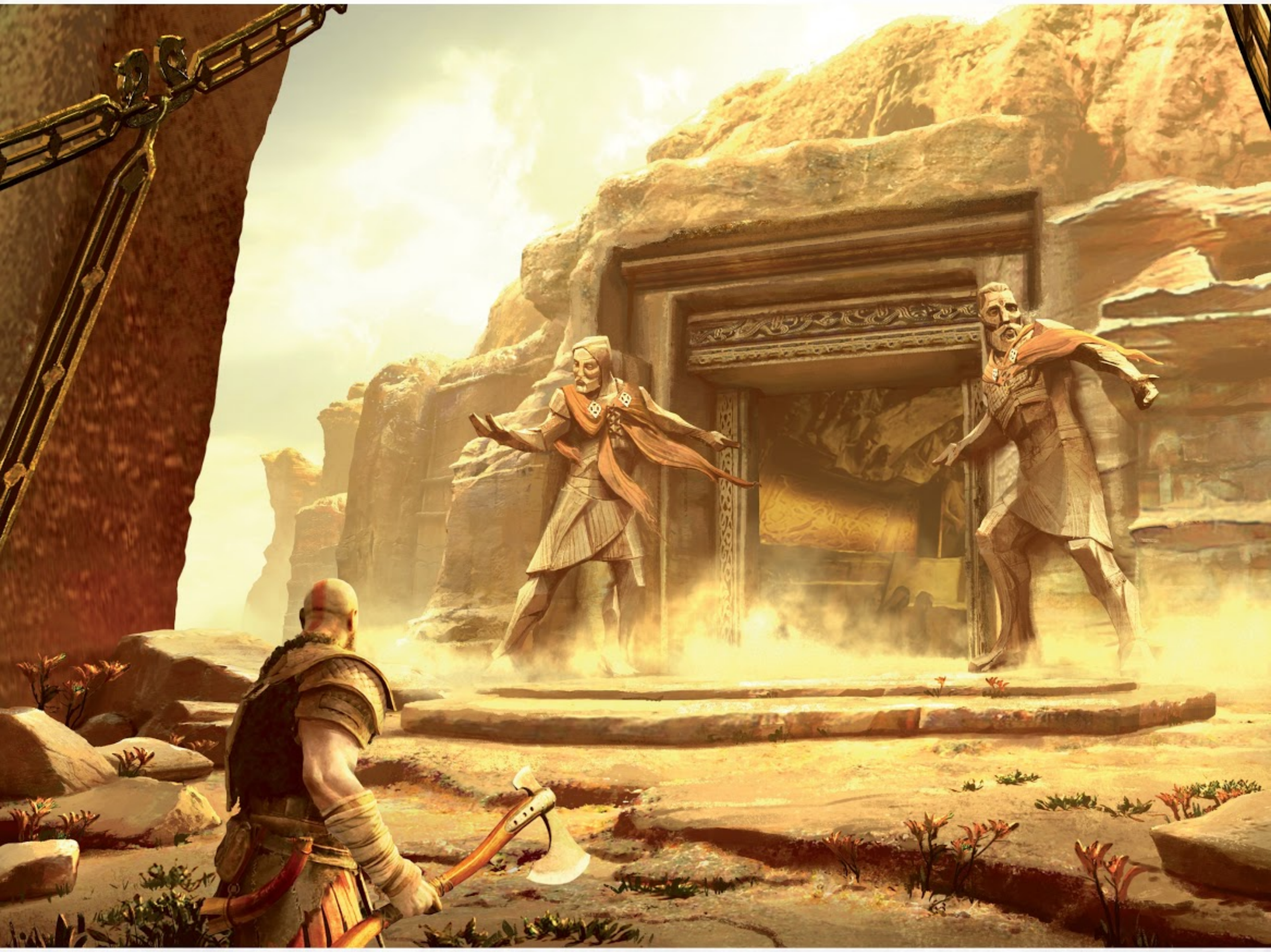




Nightmare—a deadly watcher. Artist: Stephen Oakley

Jötunheim is known for its golden and glittering fields, and is the ultimate objective and final destination of the game. The art team tinted the entire area with a warm, yellow color palette, tying back to the colors associated with the mother to imply her connection to the giants. Because this would also be the place where Atreus begins to understand his ancestry, the team wanted to show off the giants' master stonemasonry, including a massive homage to their journey from Midgard to Jötunheim.





The giants' fingers. Artist: Mark Castanon

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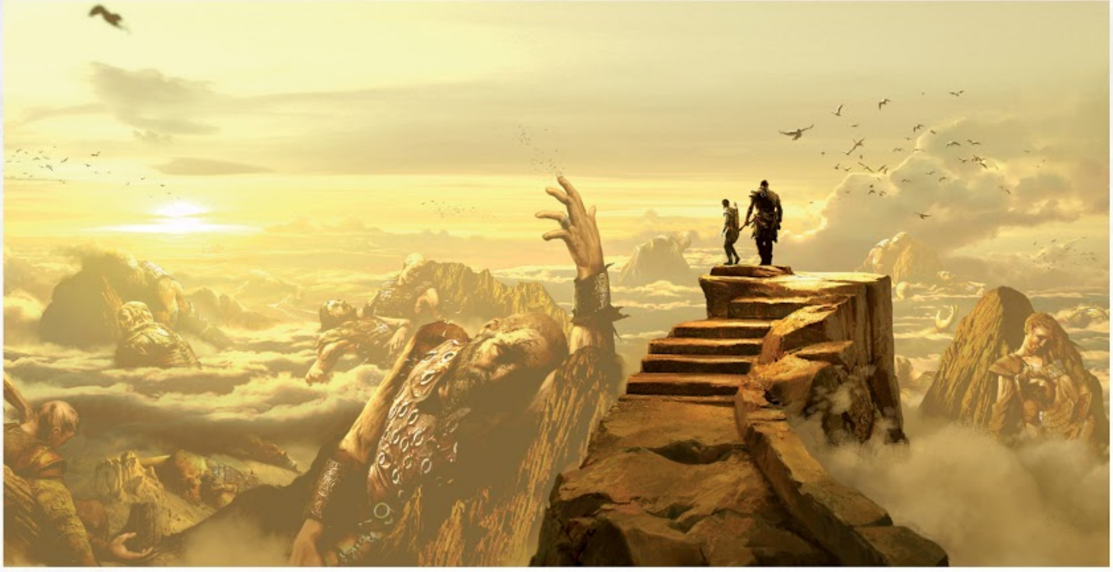
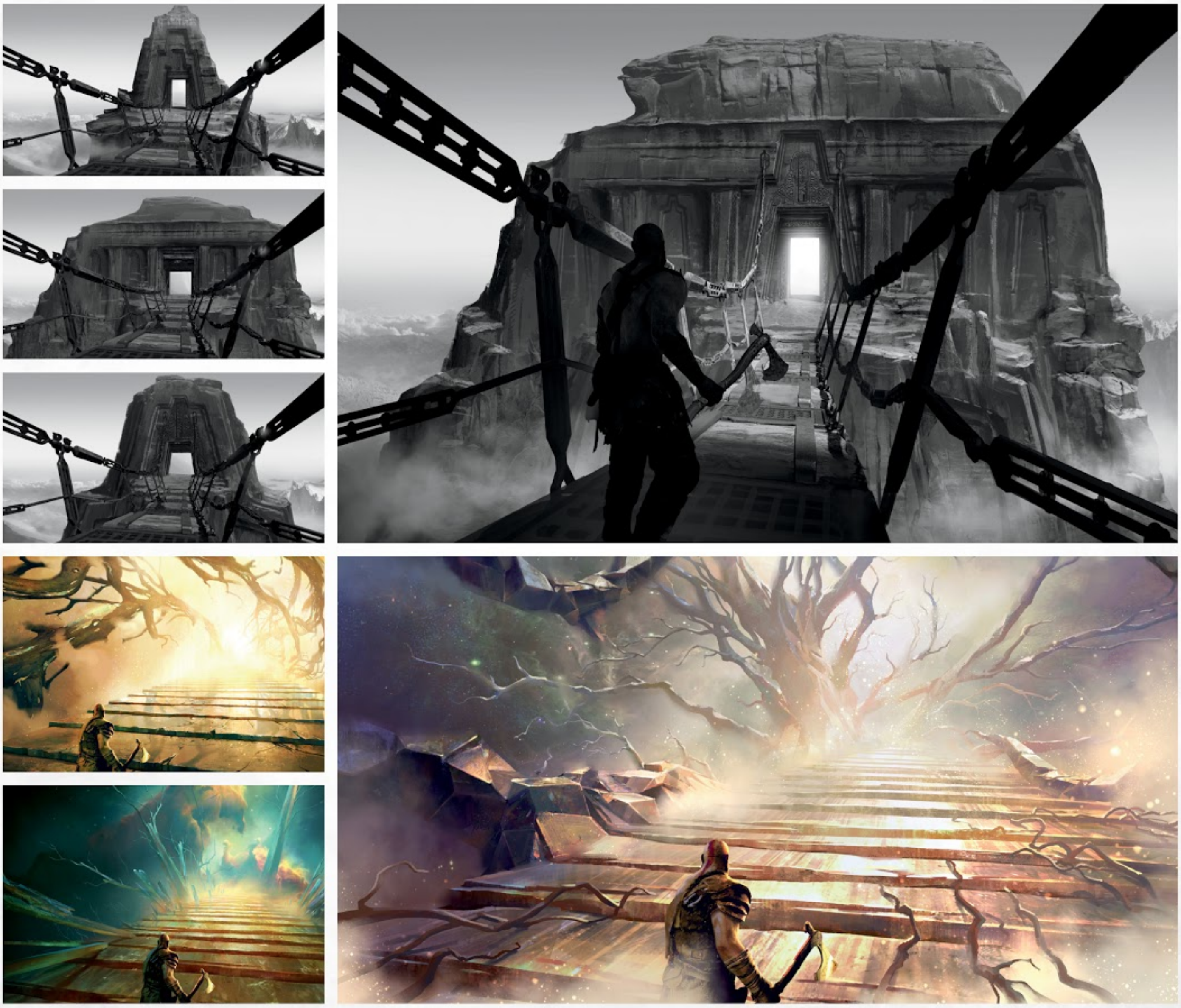
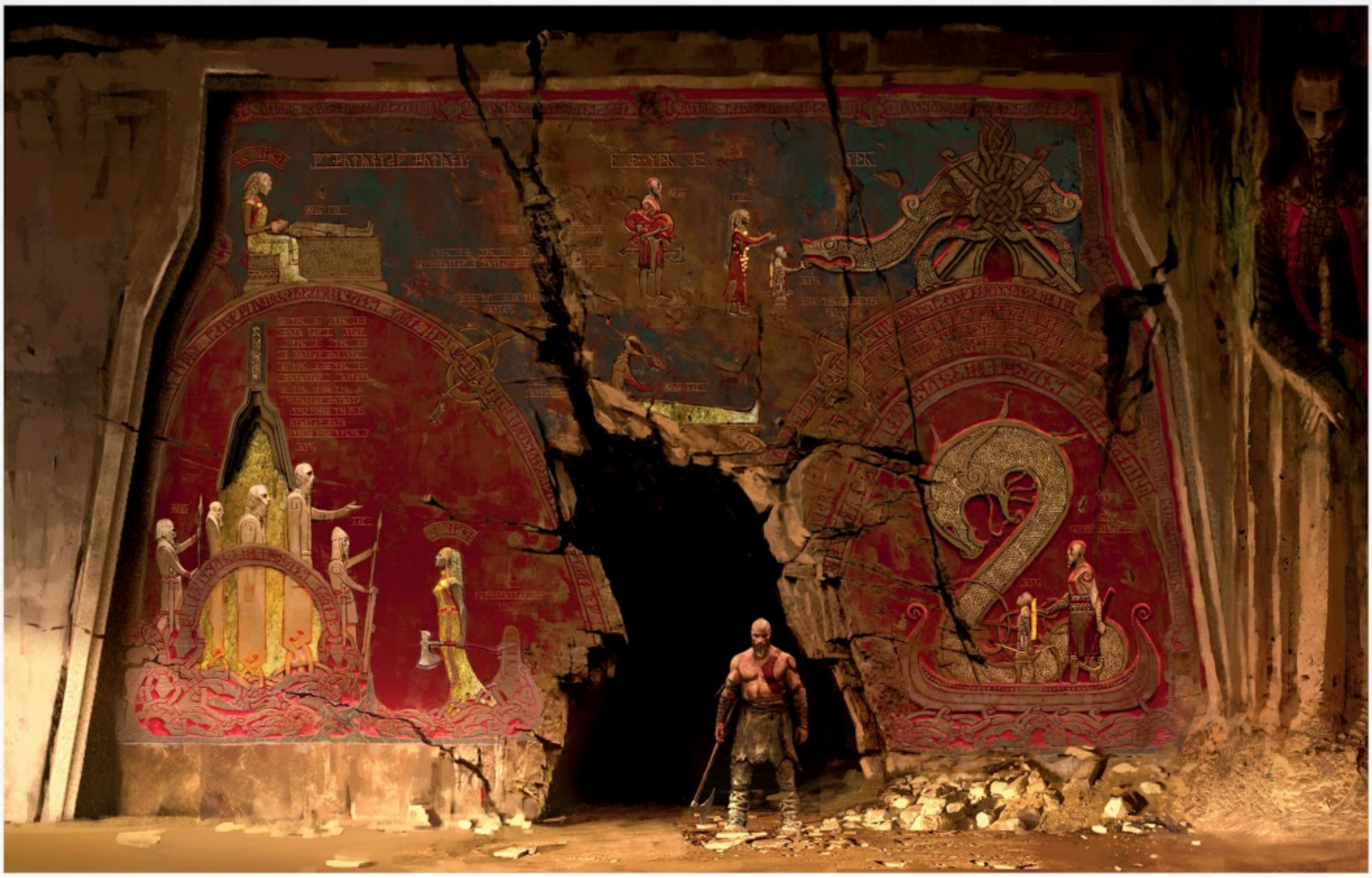
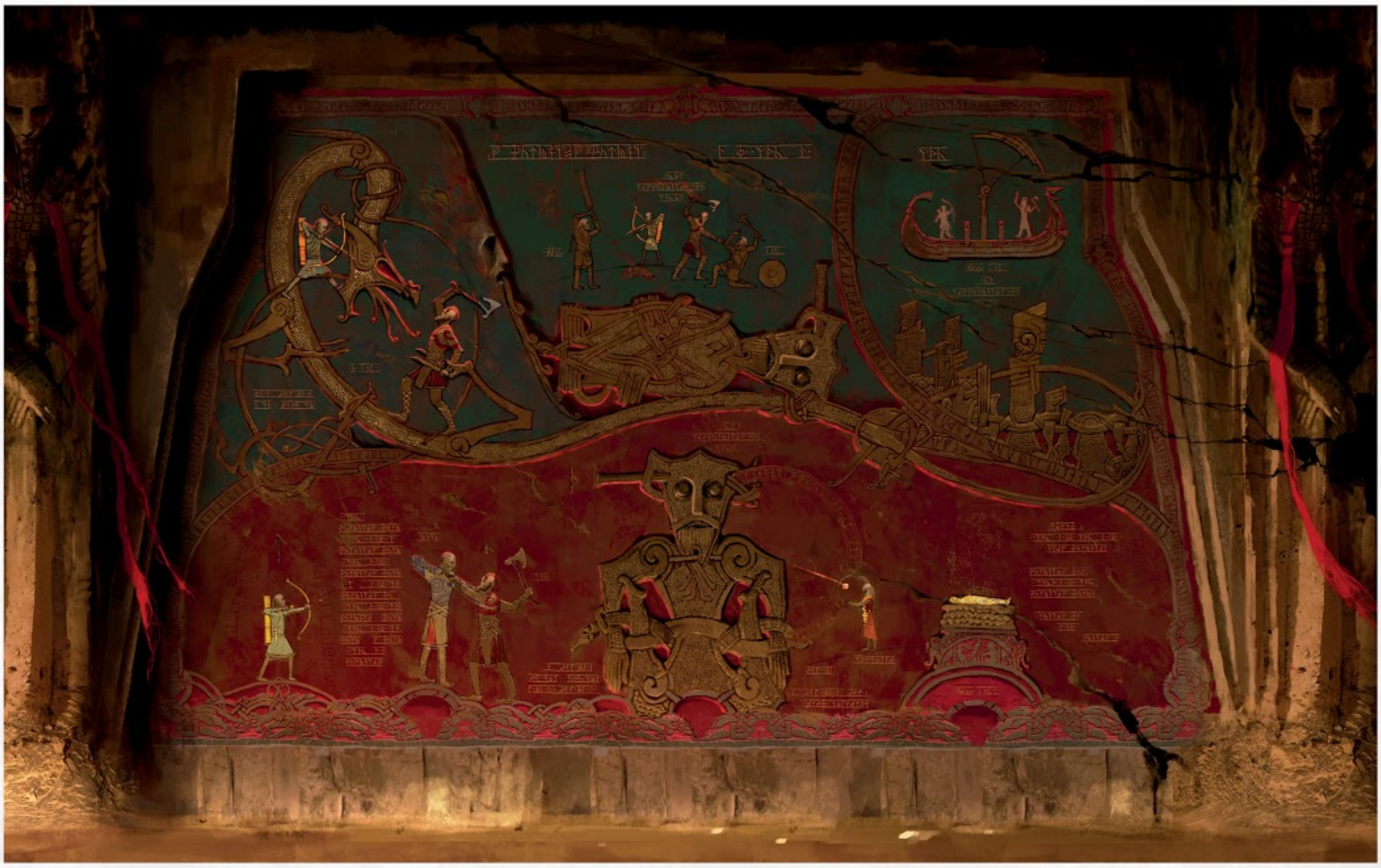


As the player moves through Jötunheim, they start to realize that even though they've made it to their goal, darkness still stretches out before them. Upon cresting over the summit, we see a wasteland of corpses—past travelers who have fallen over the hills through the clouds.

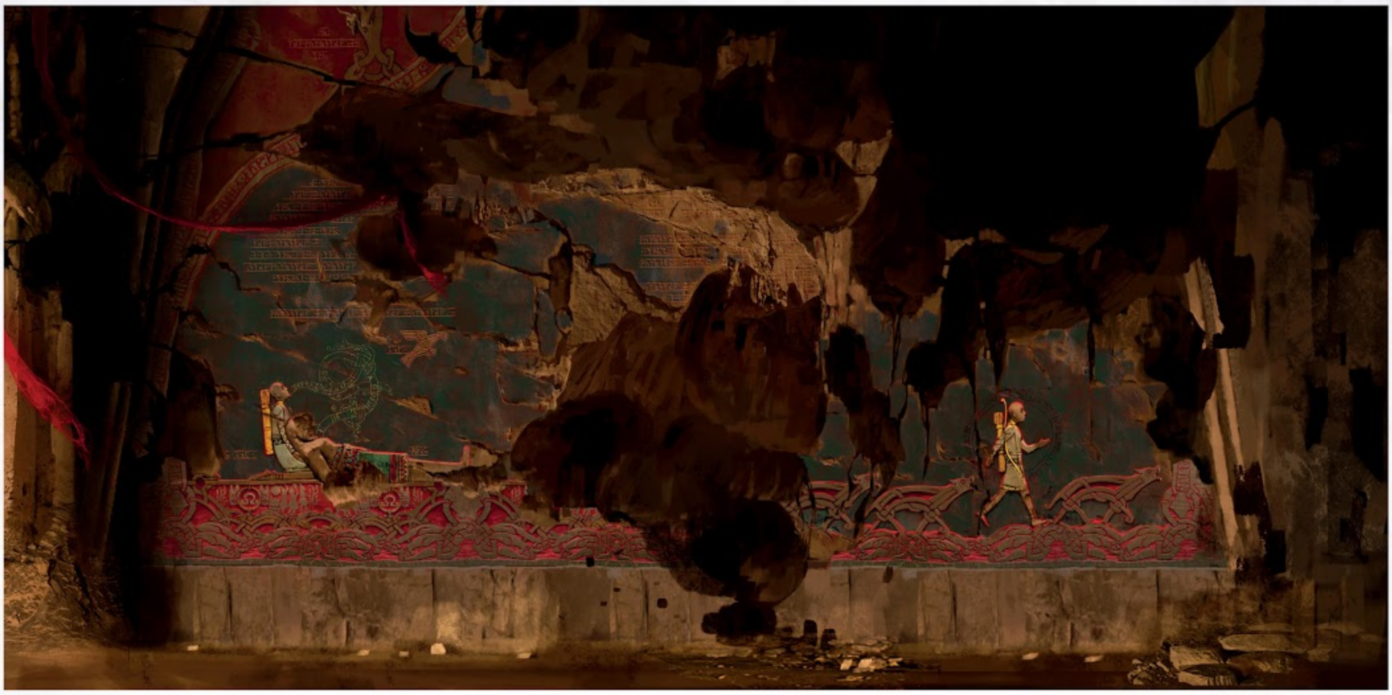


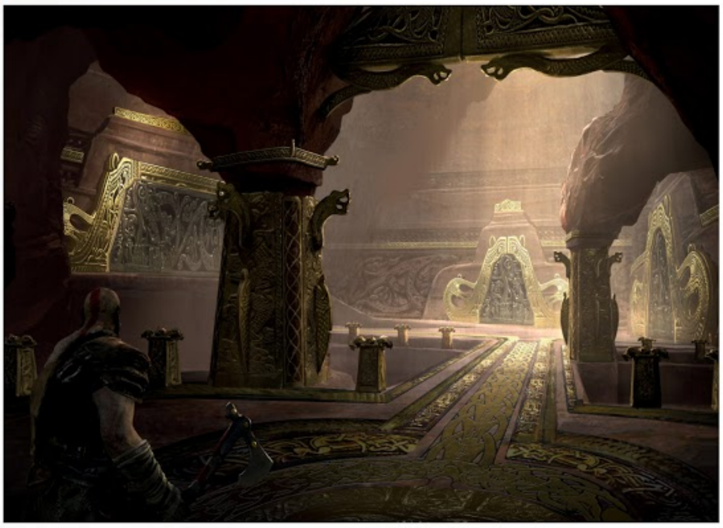
Artists: Mark Castanon (top, bottom); Jin Kim (middle)

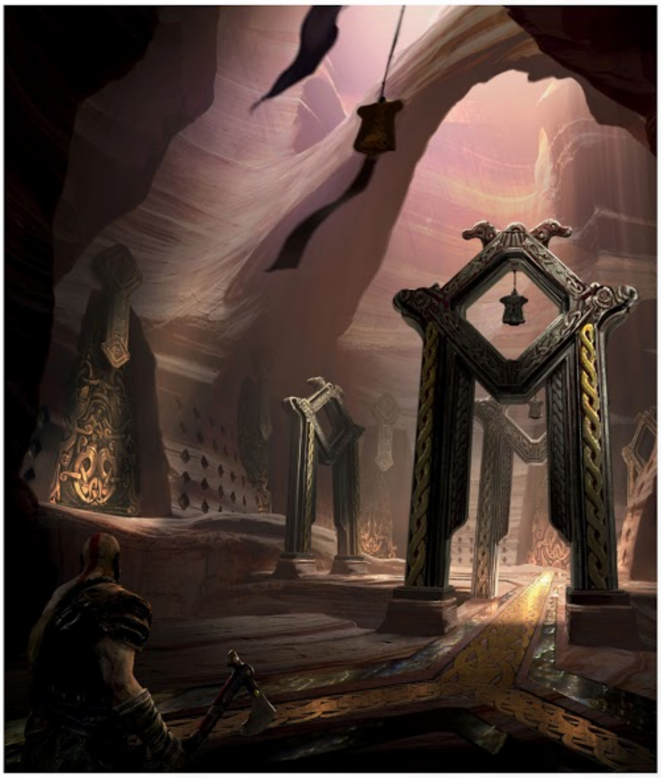


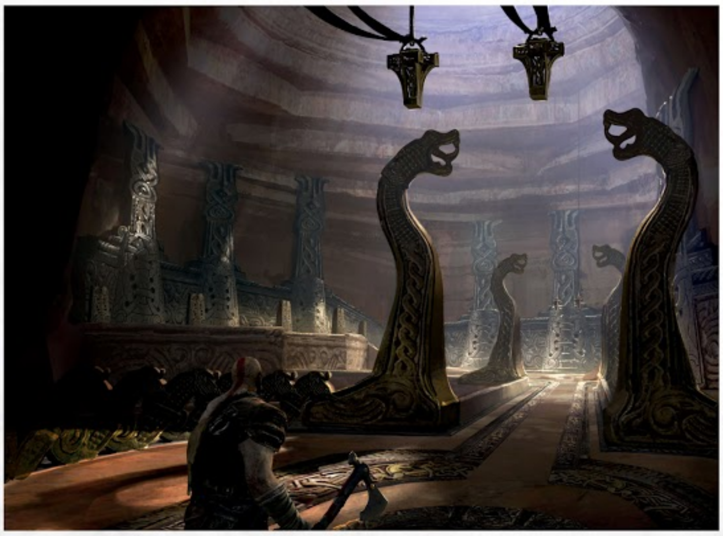


Etched in stone. Artist: José Cabrera



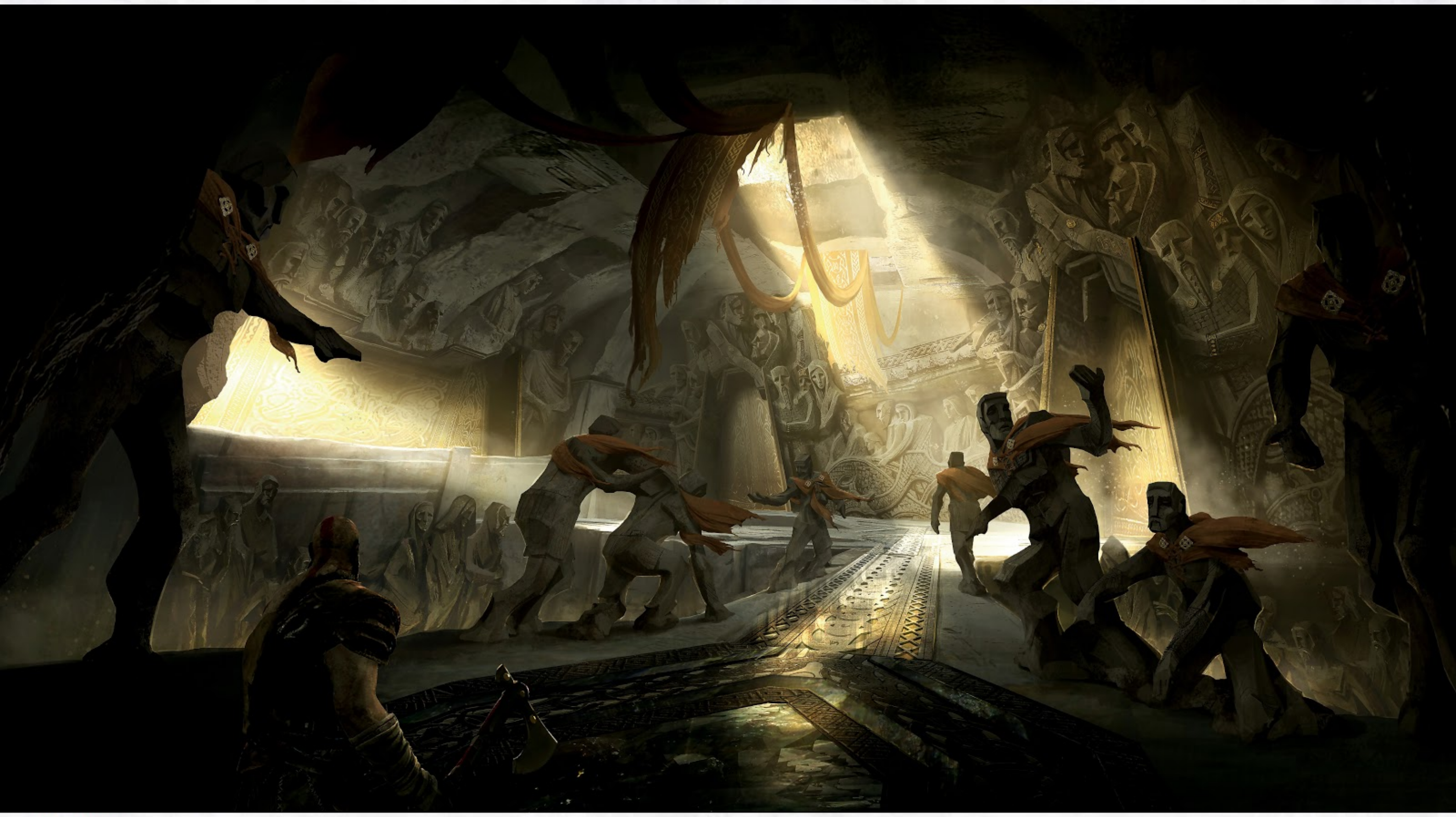






Jötunheim interior exploration. Artists: José Cabrera (top), Mark Castanon

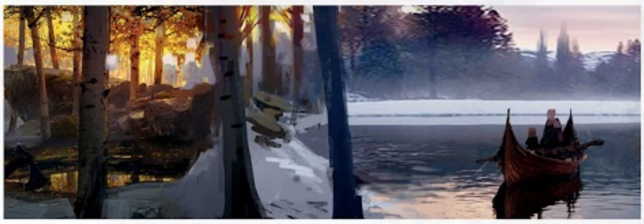
“As a concept artist, I believe that in every piece of artwork we create, we are in search for the right combination of design and narrative to help create the unique solution to whatever challenge we may face. The Jötunheim interior was a unique challenge to me because it had so much narrative significance. It ended up being sort of a sanctuary, or an homage, that the giants built for themselves as a way to remember who they were. It took several necessary explorations to get to that point where we all felt we were able to deliver something so narratively compelling,” said Mark Castanon.

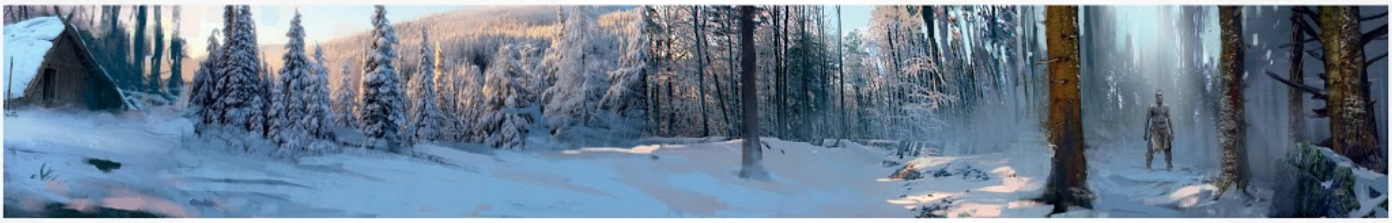


The story of the giants. Artist: Mark Castanon

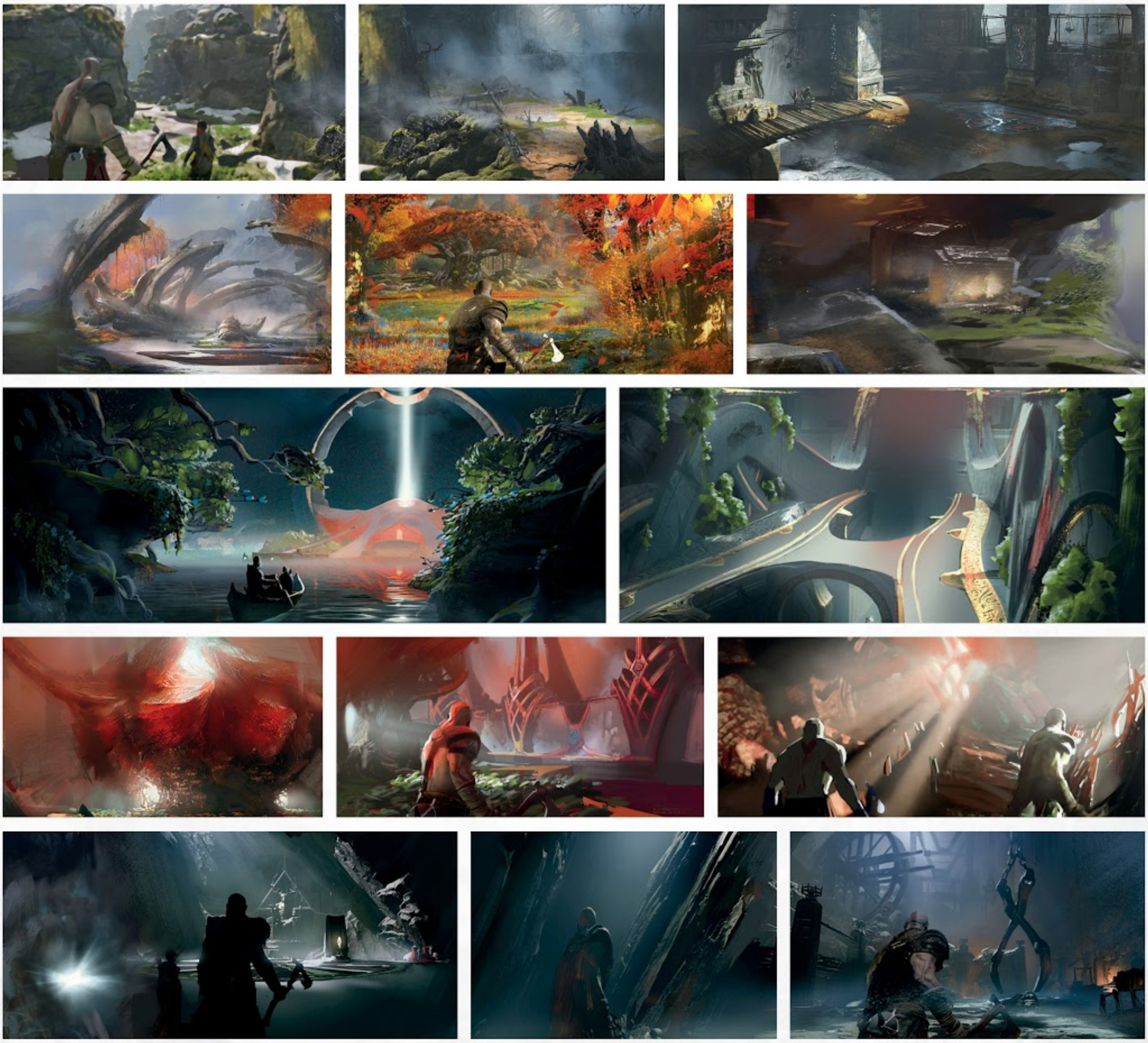
Because this is the first nonlinear *God of War* title, the team had to approach its lighting in a very different way. The goal became to devise a strategy that would allow them to light the game at a high quality while still feeling dynamic. To accomplish this, the light position and angle were kept universally consistent, while modulating the color, intensity, and the amount of visible sky and fog over time. This allowed the team to light larger areas like the Lake of Nine once, but still maintain the feeling of variety and change.

PROLOGUE





ACT ONE



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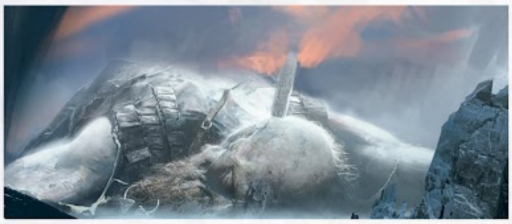

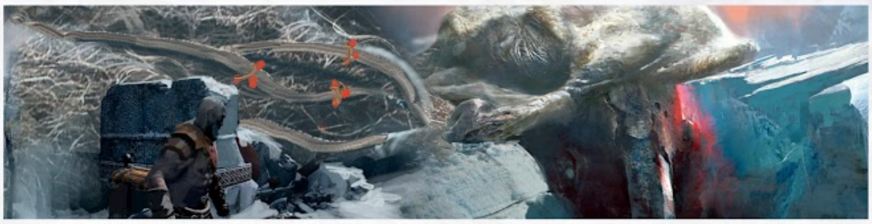

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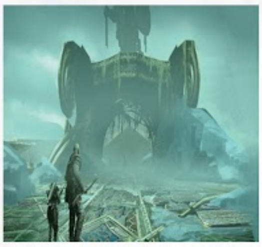

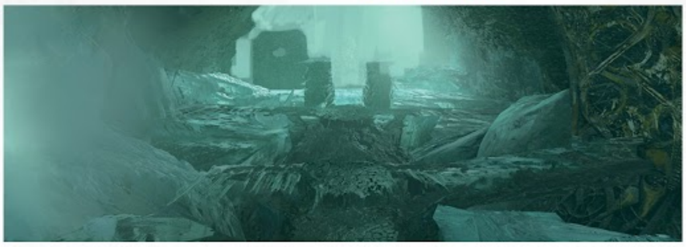

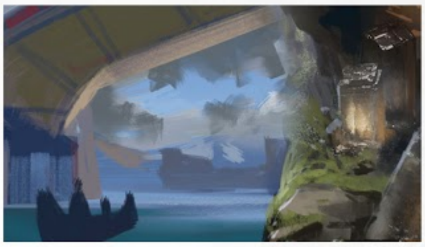

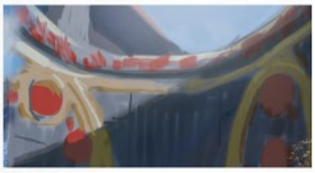

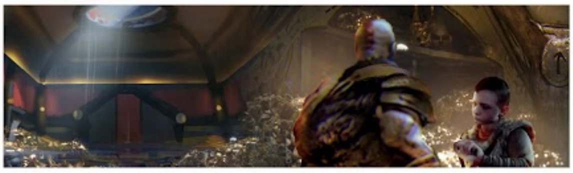

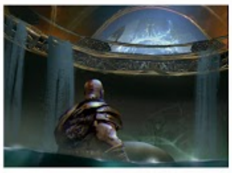

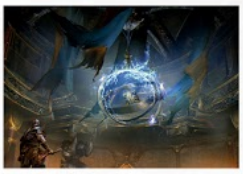

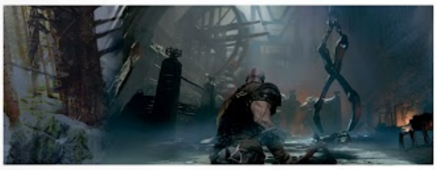

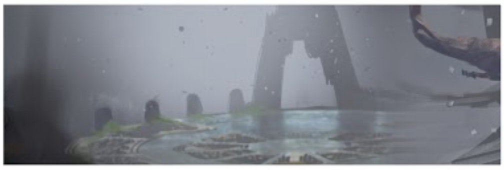

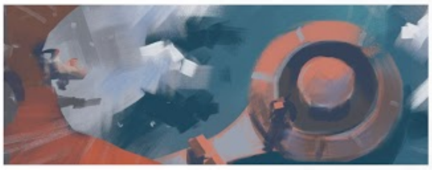

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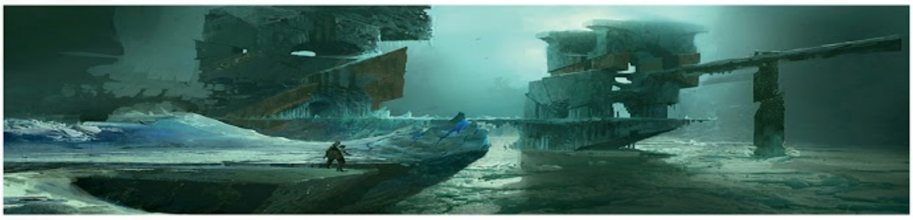

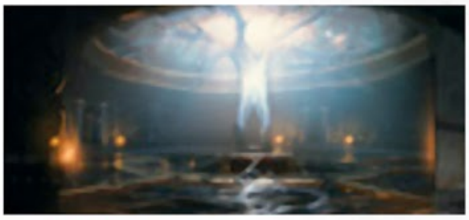

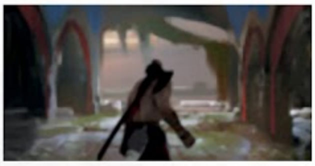

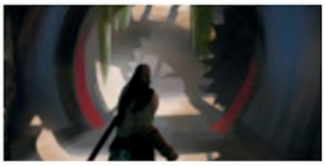

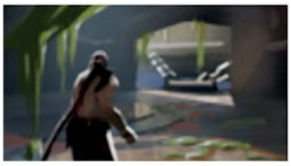

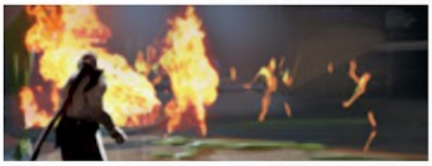

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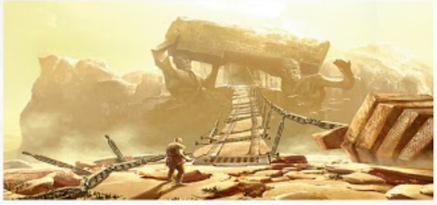
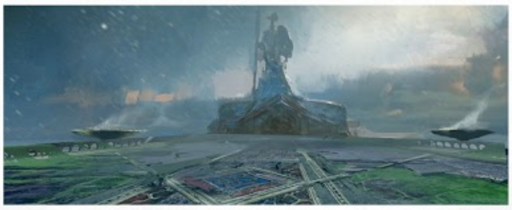
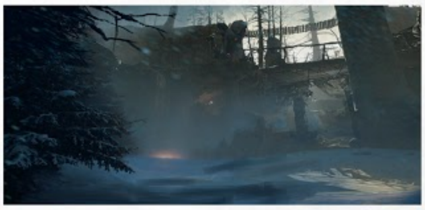
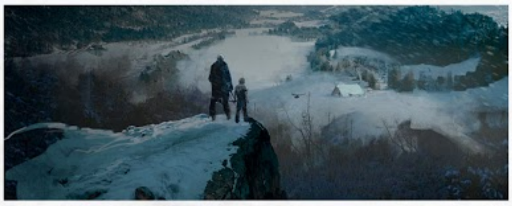
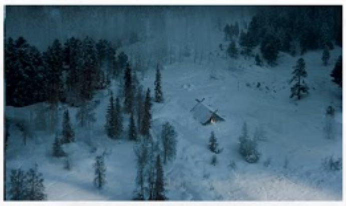
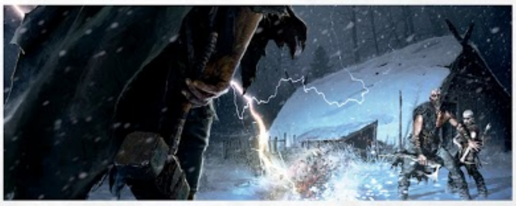


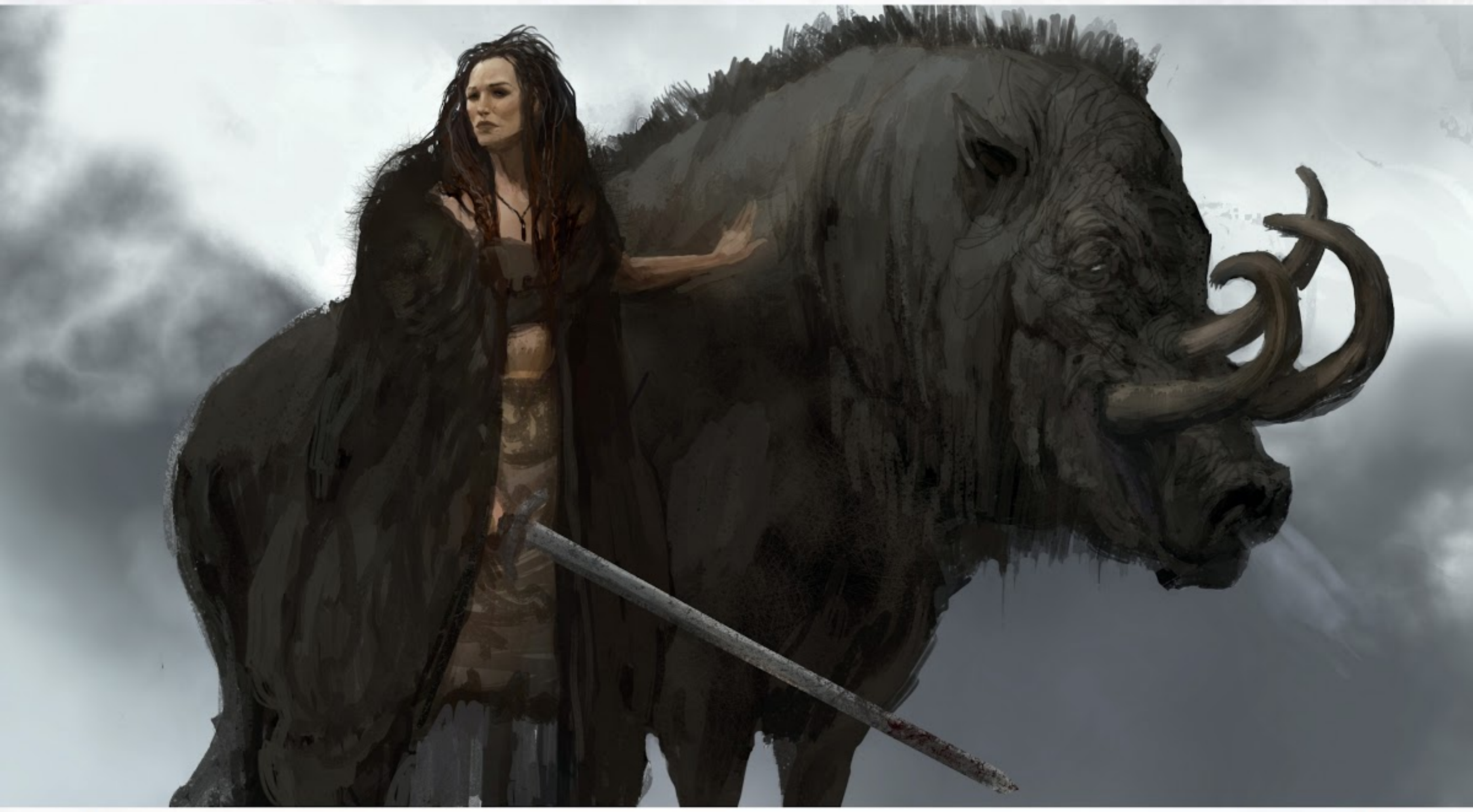


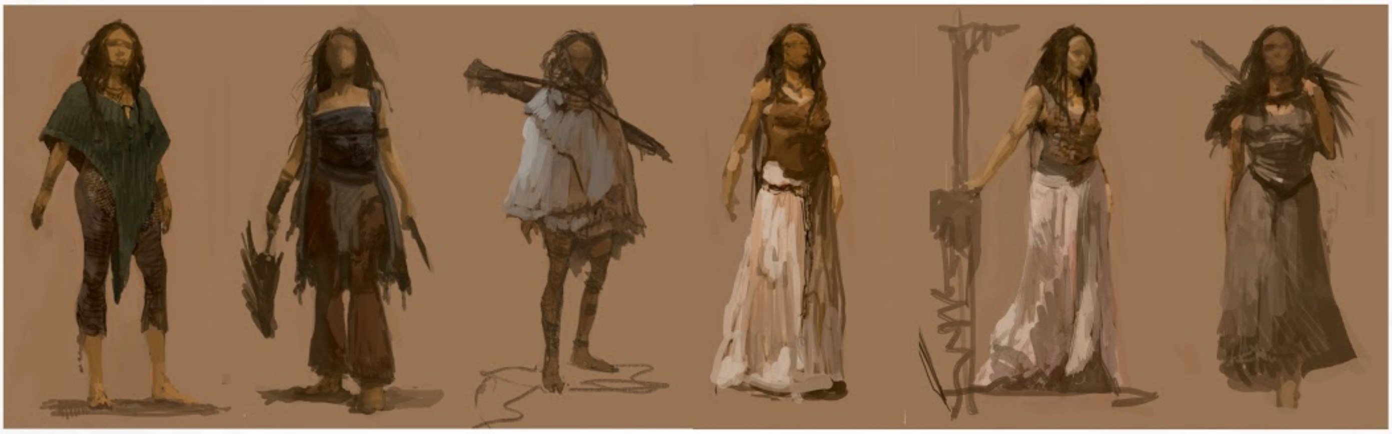




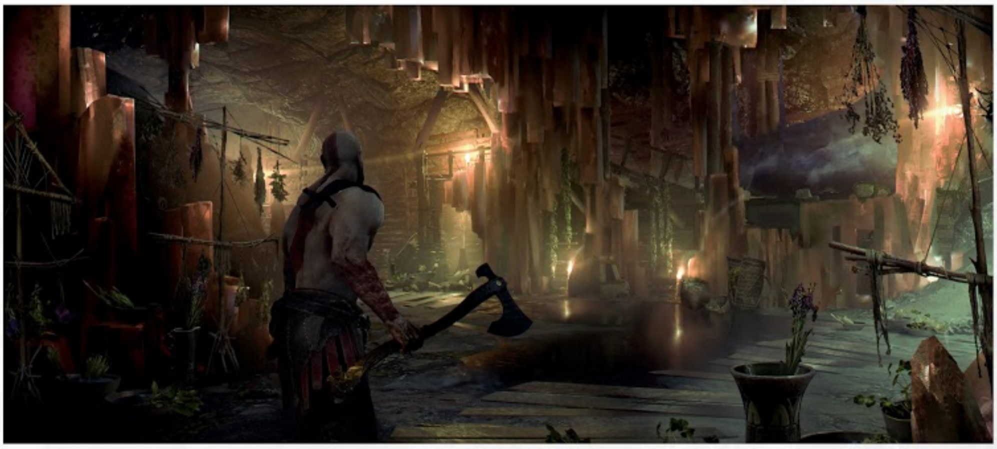




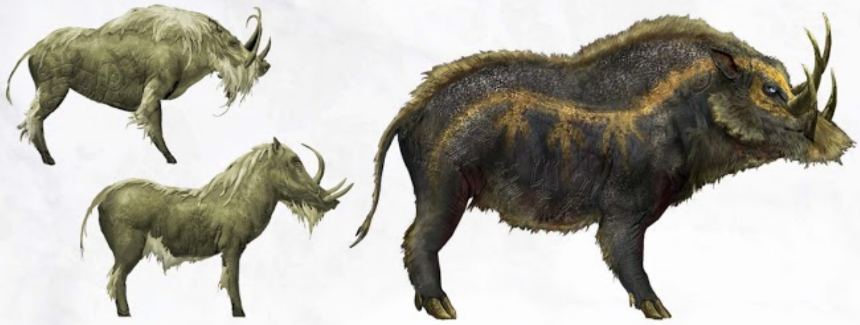




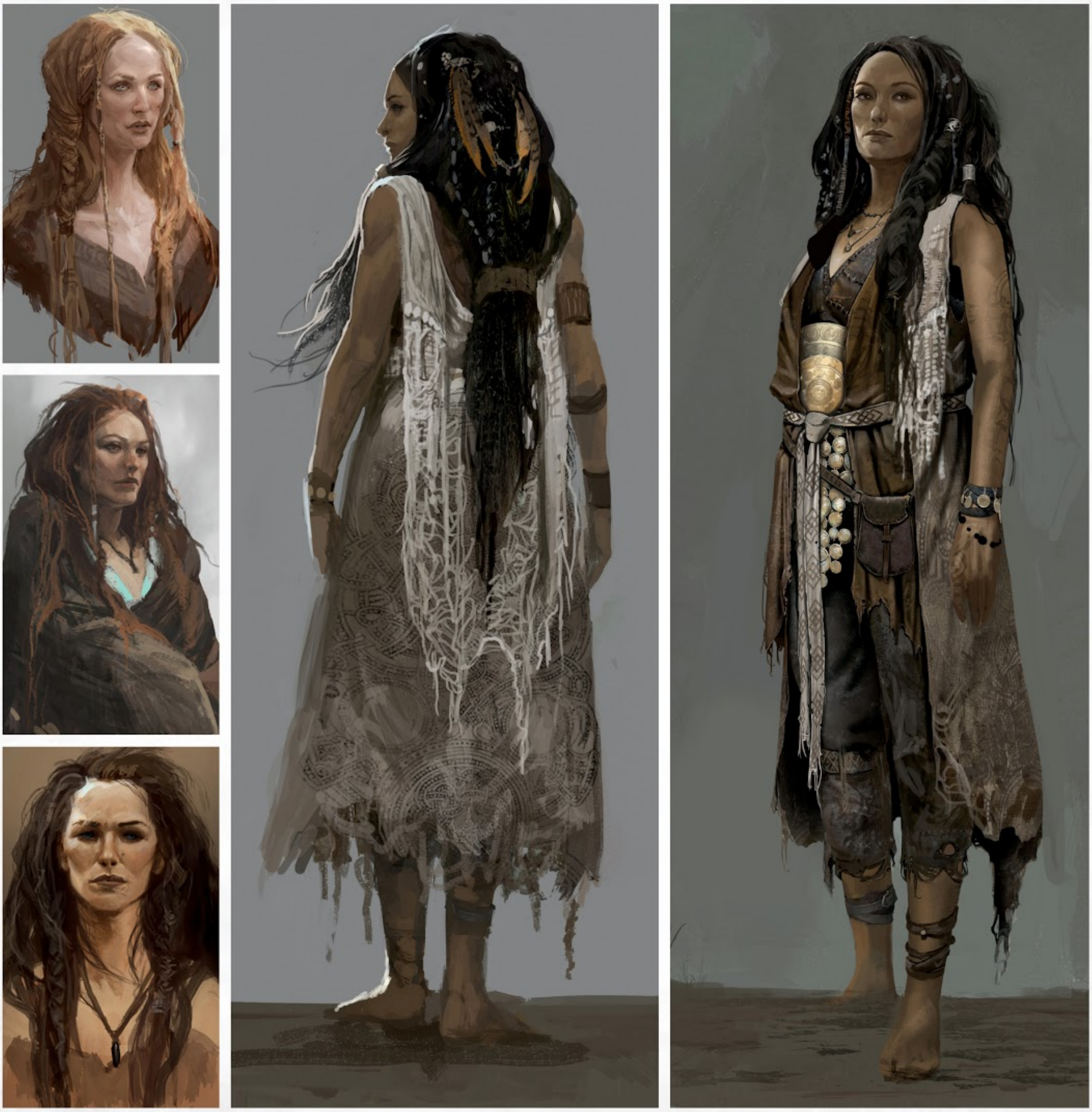
“The Witch of the Woods is a very complex character. We wanted her design to capture a mix of warrior spirit and a compassionate heart,” said Dela Longfish. “Her character is also someone who is in touch with the natural world and still retains a sense of nobility. As she aids our heroes on their journey, we discover much more of her backstory than she first leads on.”



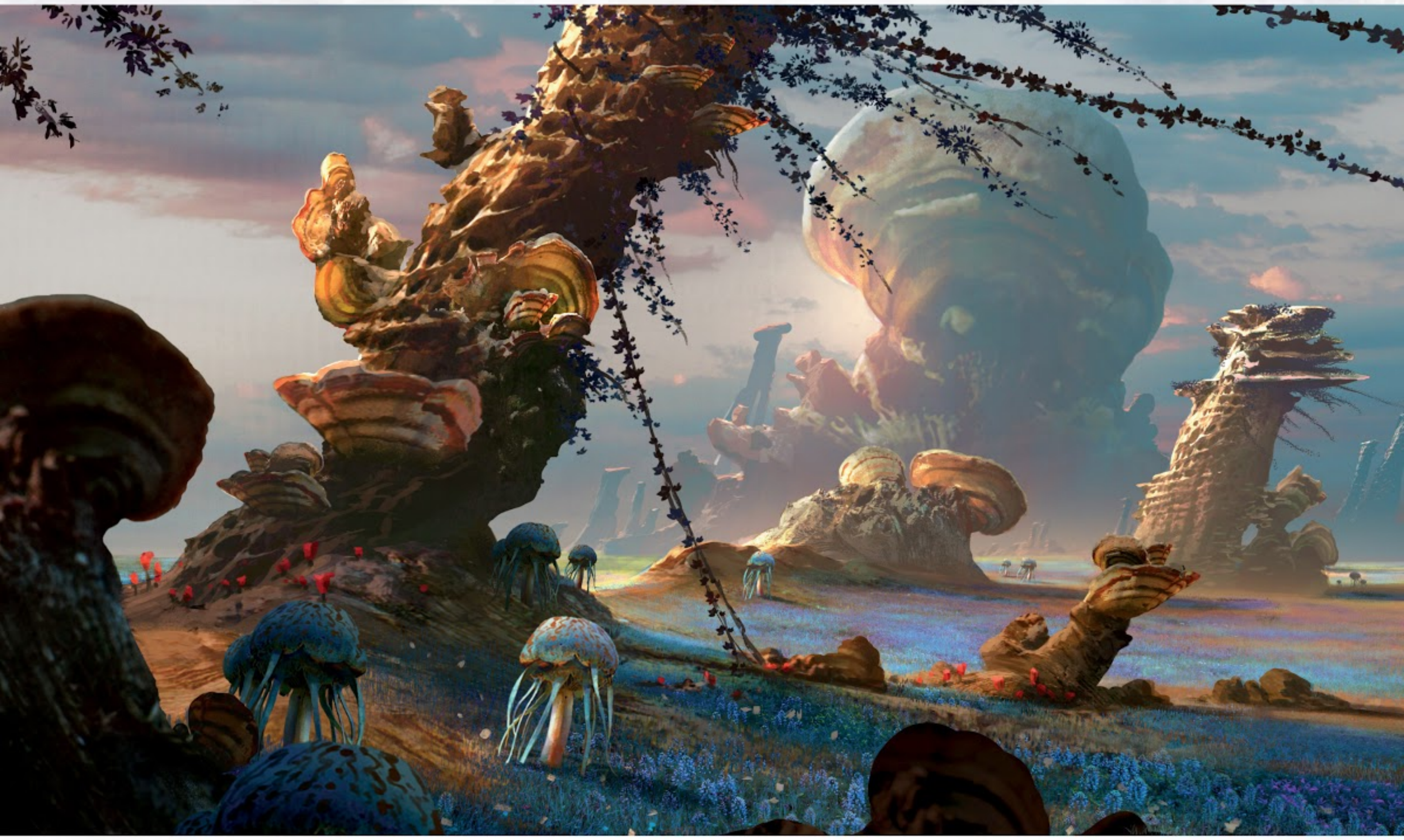
Witch of the Woods. Artists: Abe Taraky (bottom); Vance Kovacs

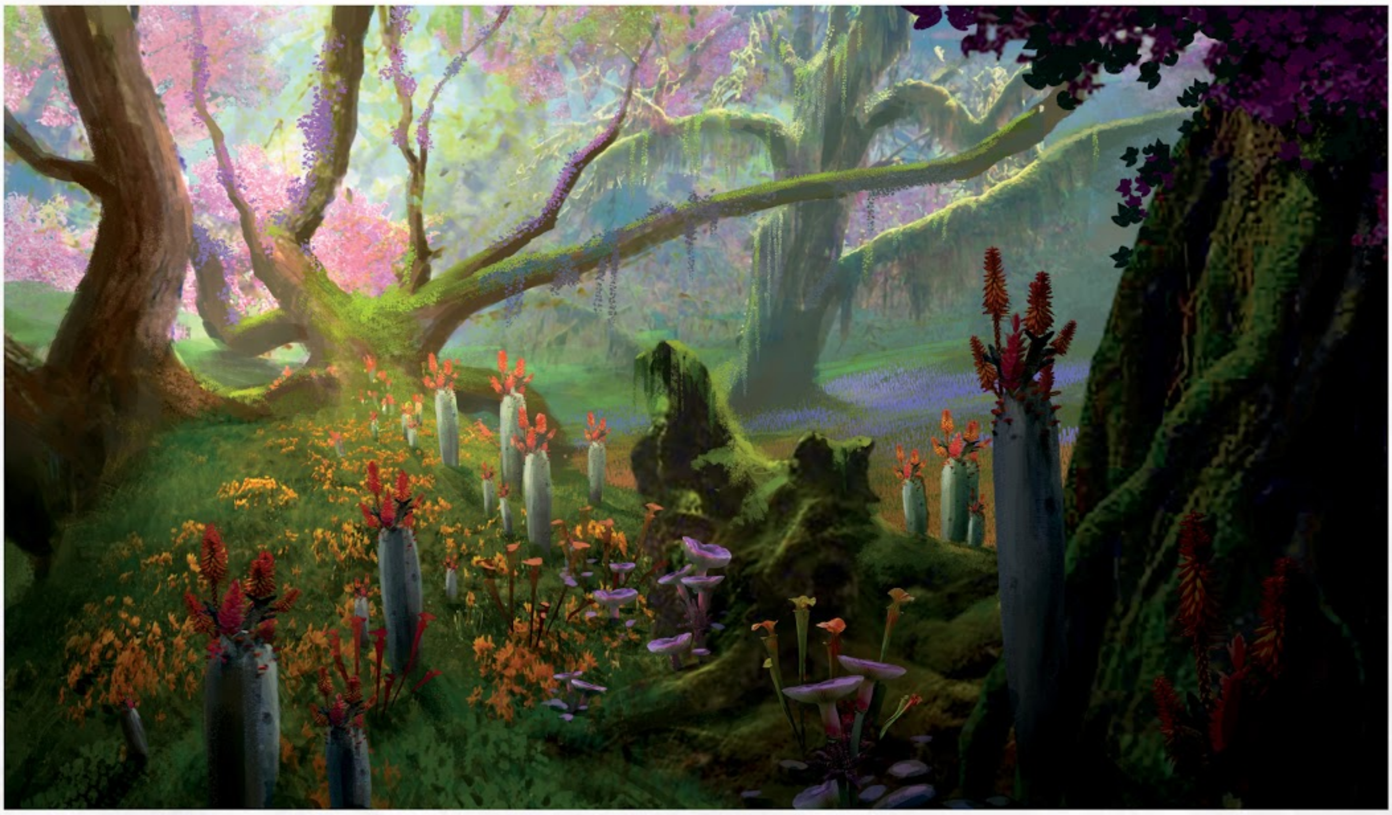


The initial pitch for the Witch of the Woods' boar was a gilded, magical creature that stands out from all other boars. In some of the initial sketches, the entire body had a golden sheen; ultimately the team landed on a more subdued version, with flaxen hair, golden horns, sparkling skin, and golden particles in the boar's toes. The black skin was integrated to provide higher contrast with the gold on the boar's body, and the stave markings on its body reflect its mythological nature.

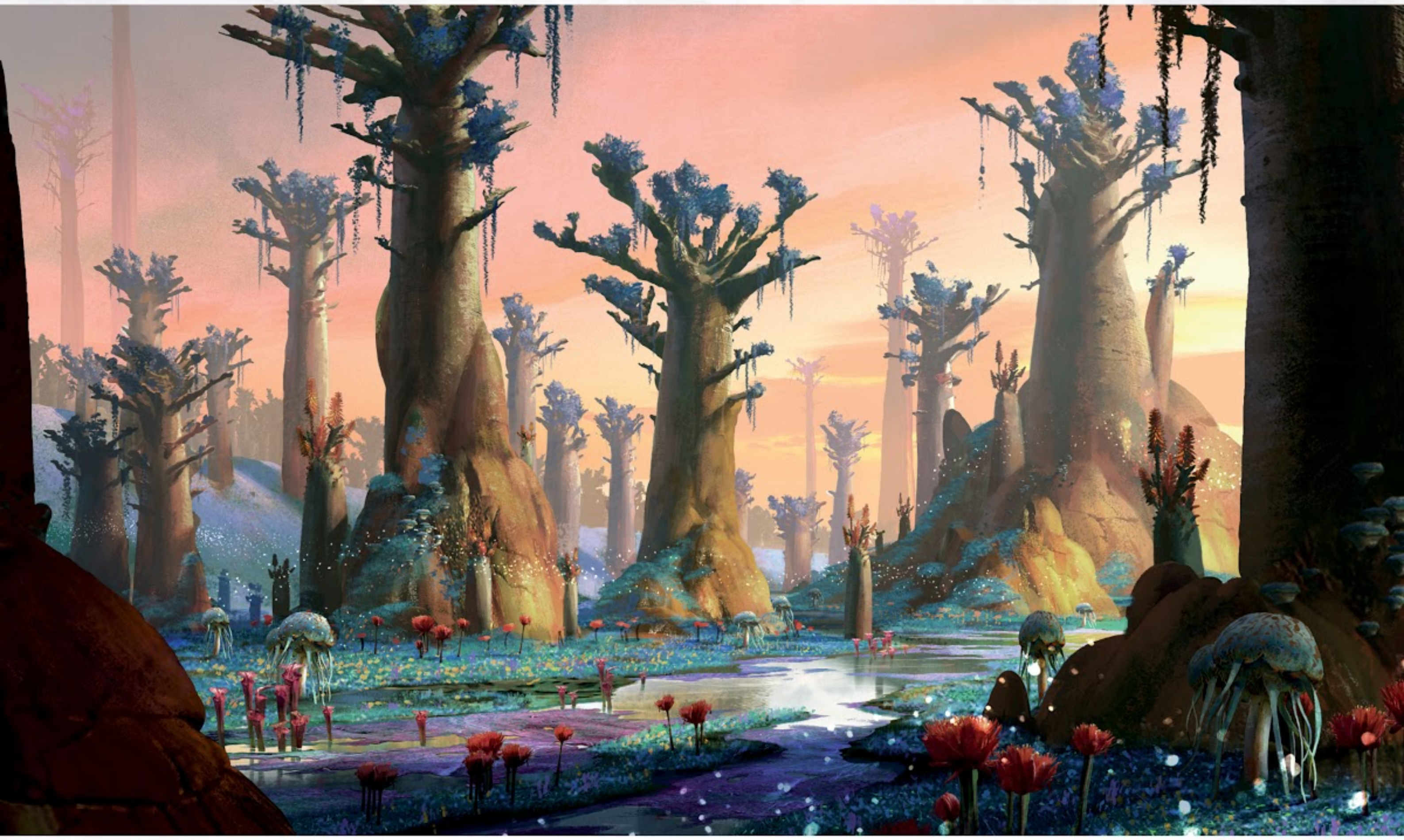


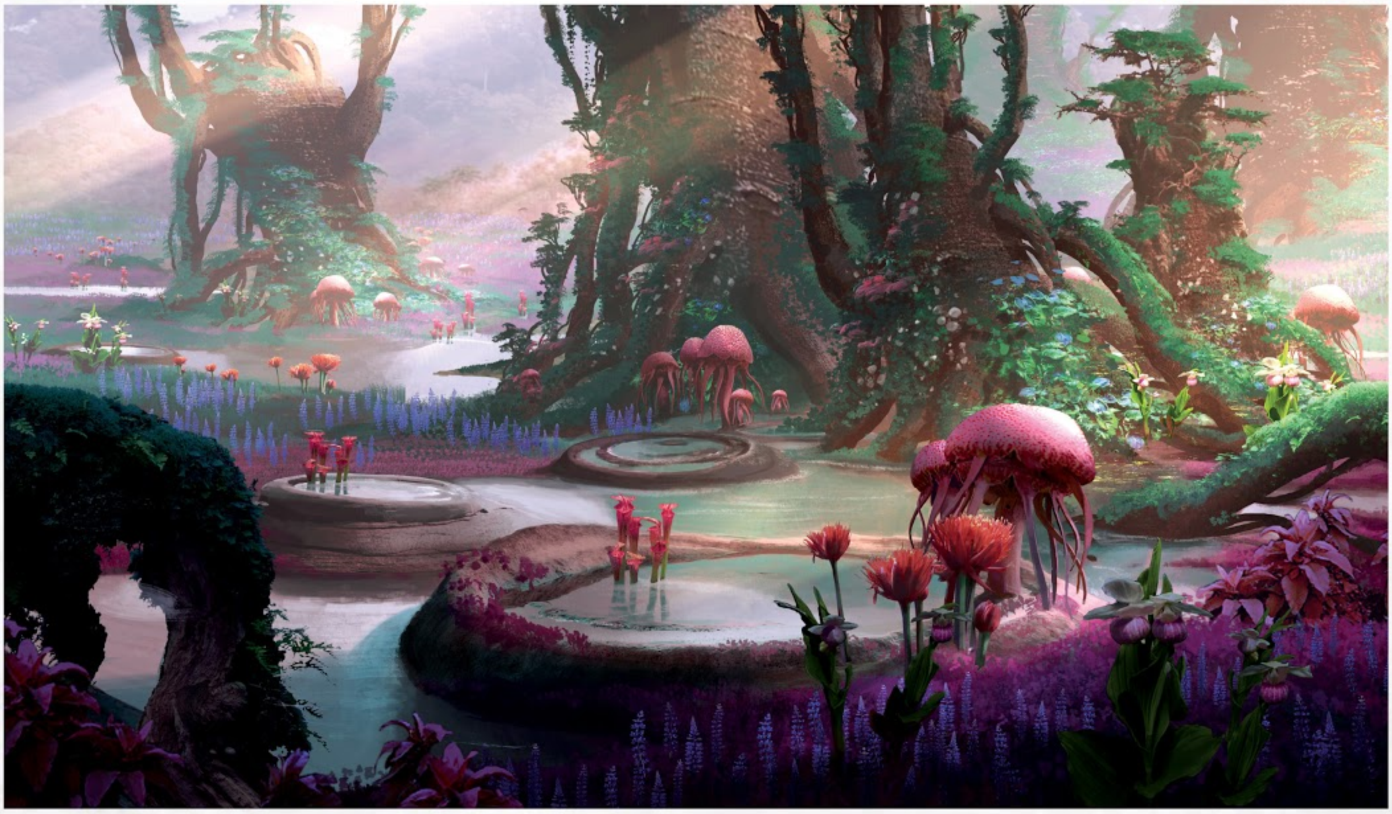
Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Vance Kovacs (bottom)



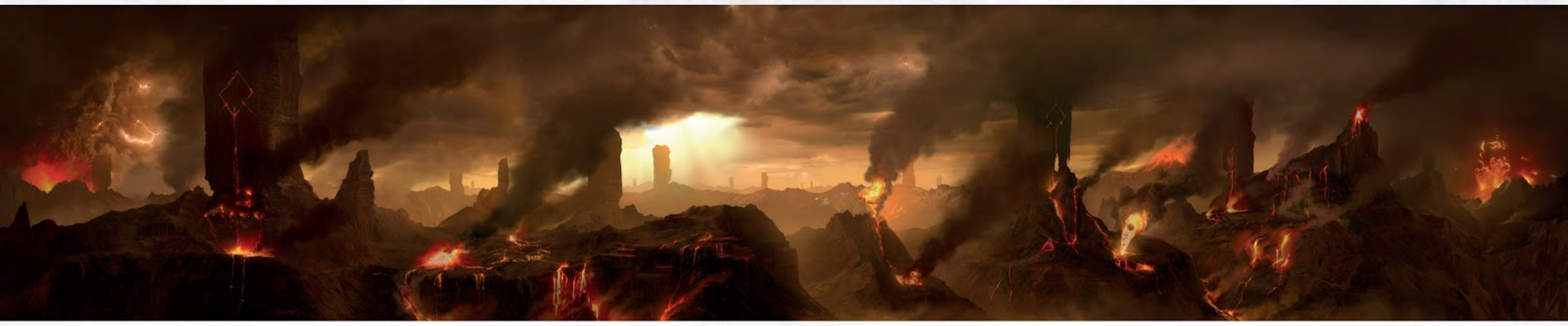


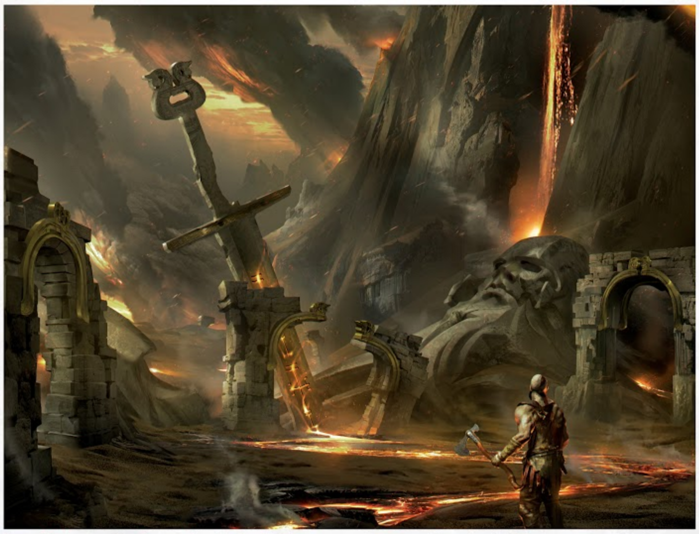
An otherworldly look. Artist: Mark Castanon



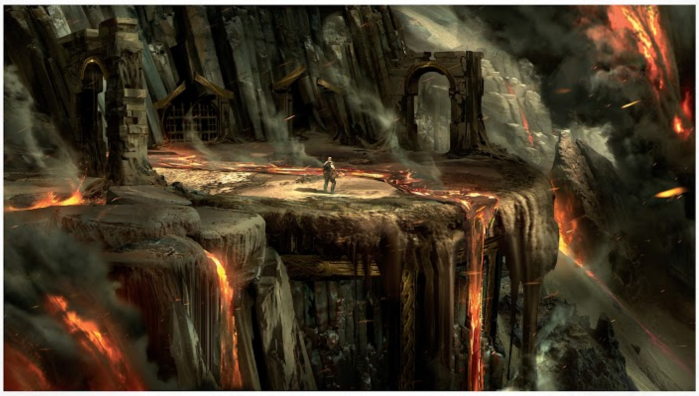


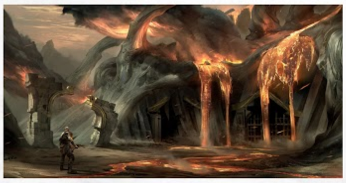
A window into Vanaheim. Artist: Mark Castanon

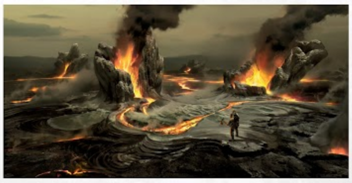




Home of the fire giants, Muspelheim is a hot volcanic world. The art team created an imposing hellscape through which players would grind, battling enemies and ascending up a giant volcano. The fire giant, Surtr, was an inspiration for some of these concepts. The lore states that Surtr can forge a giant sword of fire and lava, which will be used during Ragnarok to slay the gods and burn the world. Artists: Abe Taraky (bottom, opposite); Jin Kim (top)

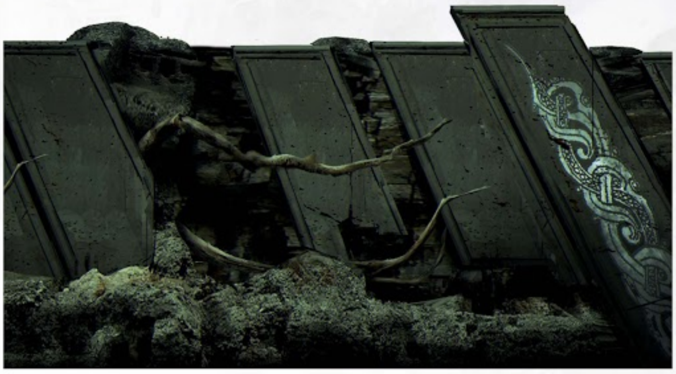


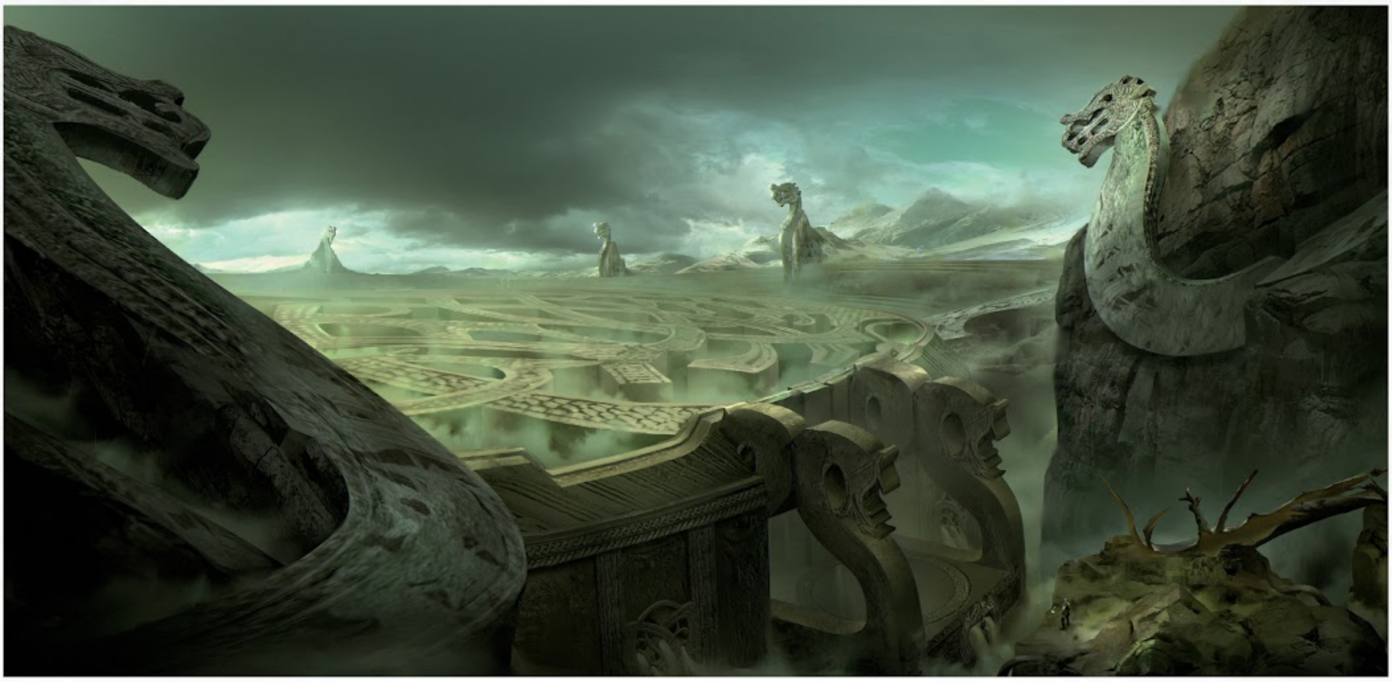


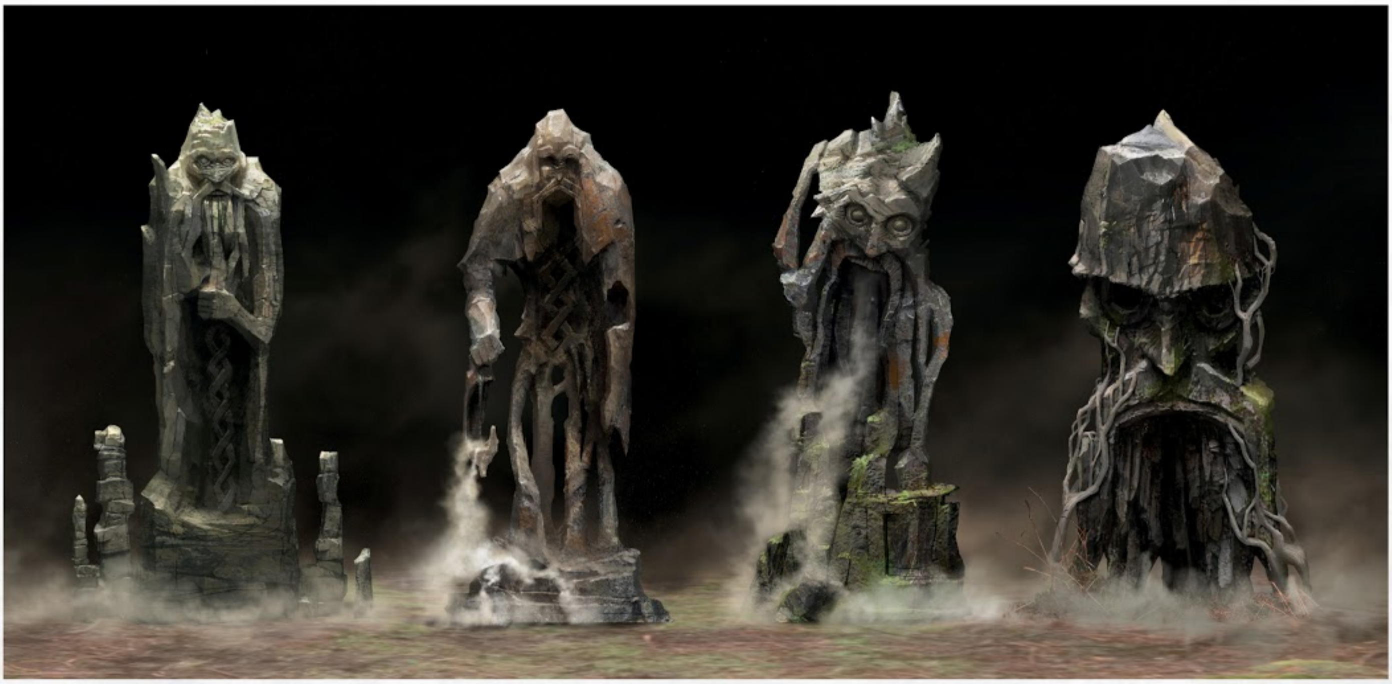


"Early in development the team was prototyping level ideas with the goal of taking risks beyond what we would do in a critical path story level. We started to explore the use of extremely heavy fog to add atmosphere, but also to add mystery to the world. This broke many of the design metrics and rules for the game, as much of the player's visibility was constrained," said John Palamarchuk.

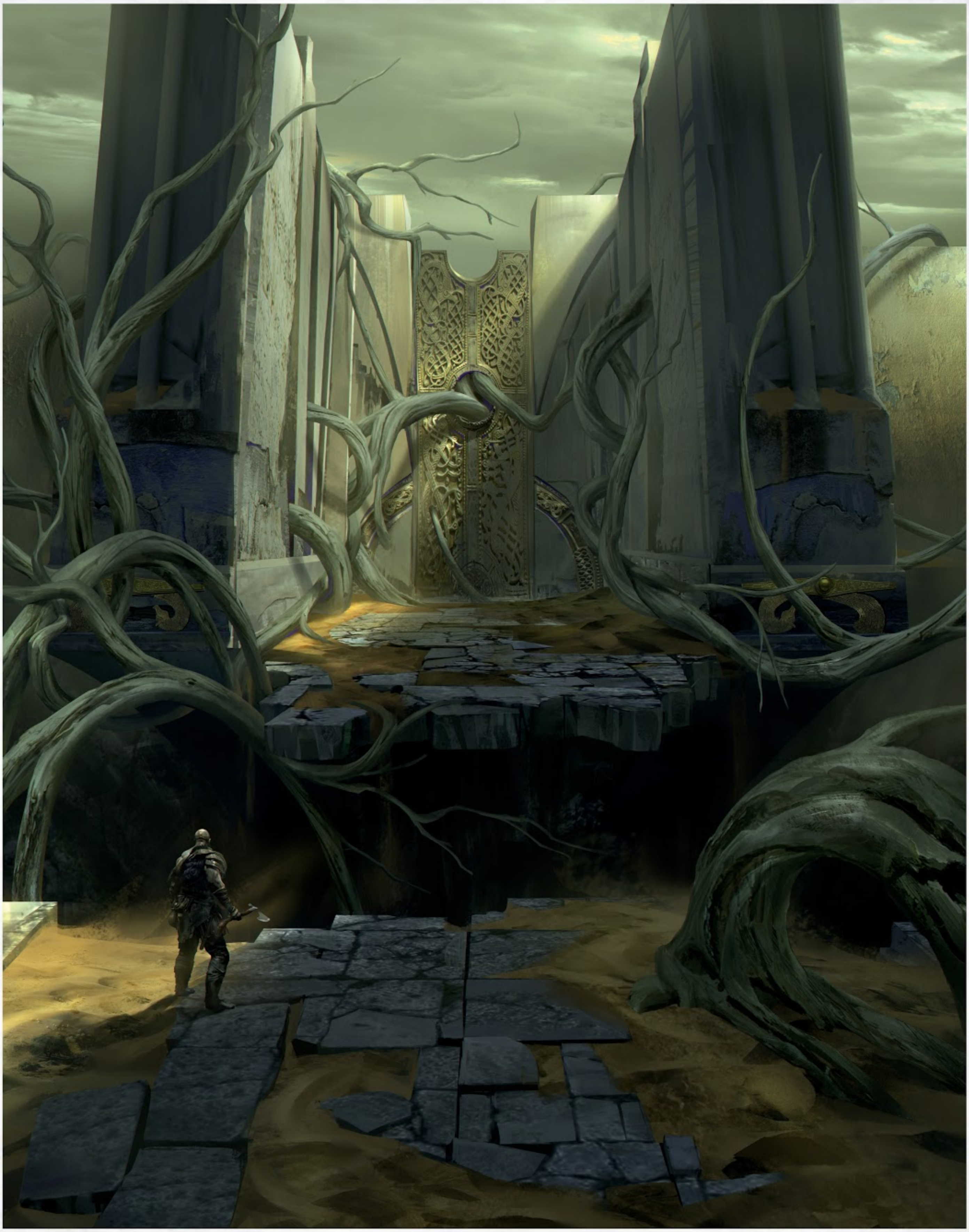
"We ended up going with an out-of-the-box idea that made the art visually unique and the combat thrilling. Over time, layers of ideas were folded into the realm that became Niflheim. The fog became poisonous, the poison flowing from the pollen of unique Niflheim plants, which helped tie together both the visual look and design of the level."



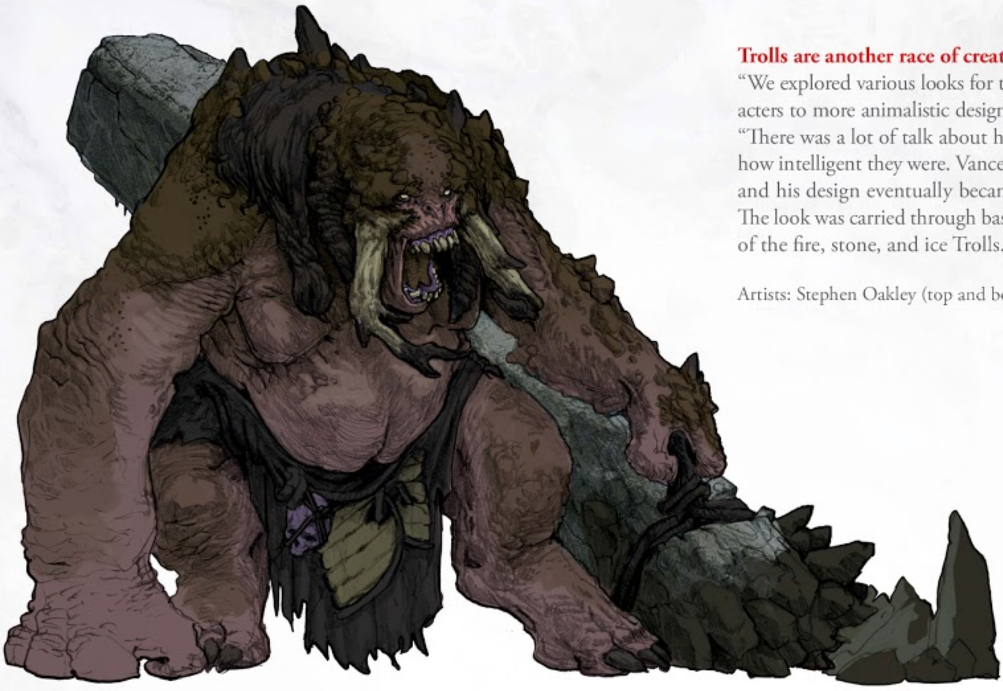




The poisonous mists of Niflheim. Artists: Jin Kim (bottom); Abe Taraky

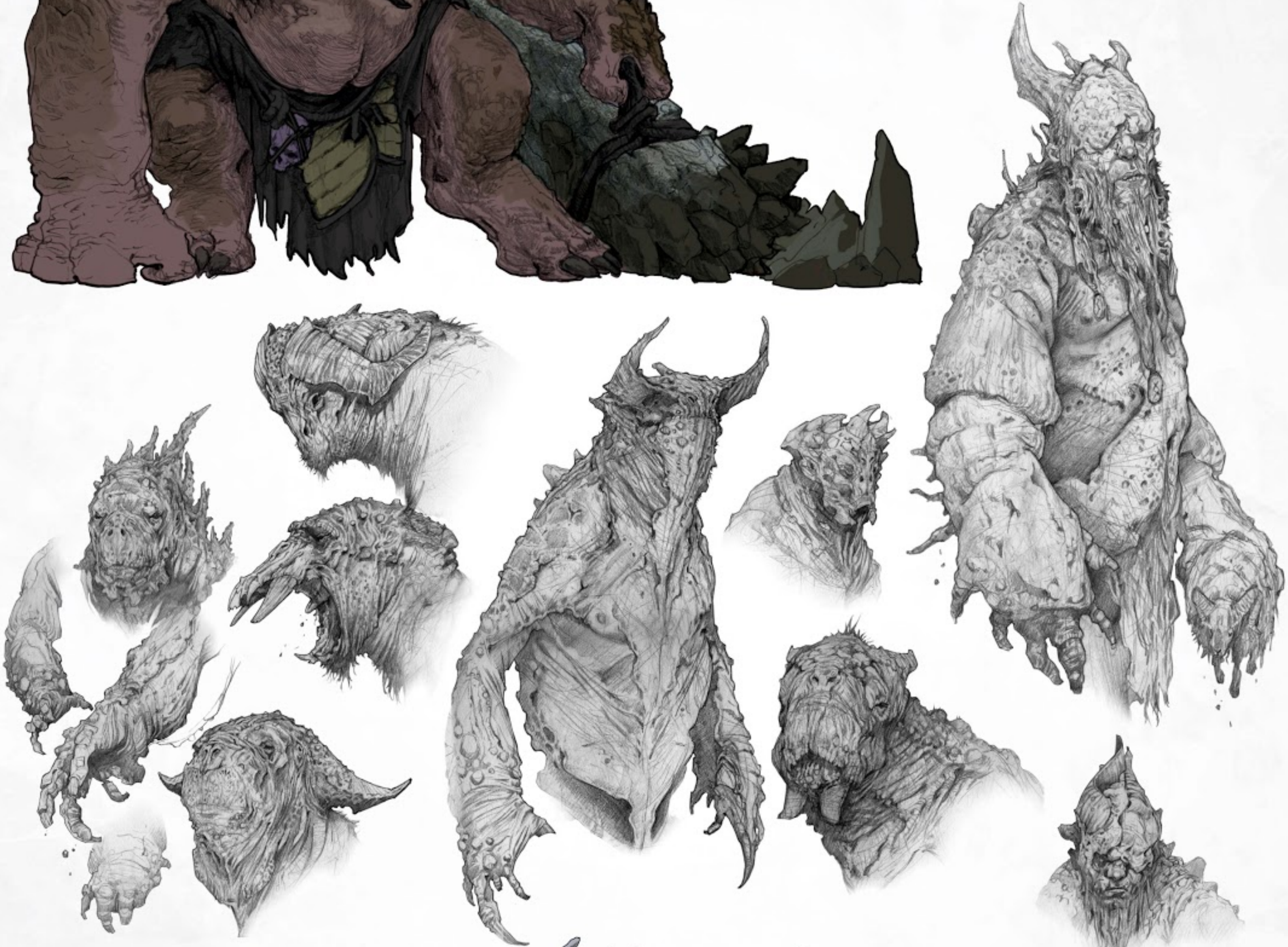


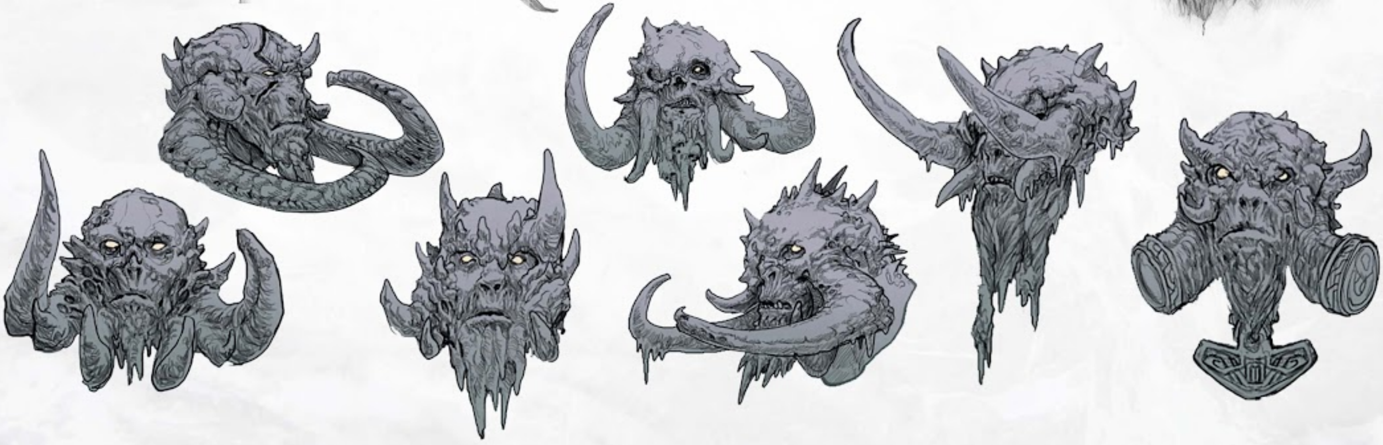
Artist: Abe Taraky

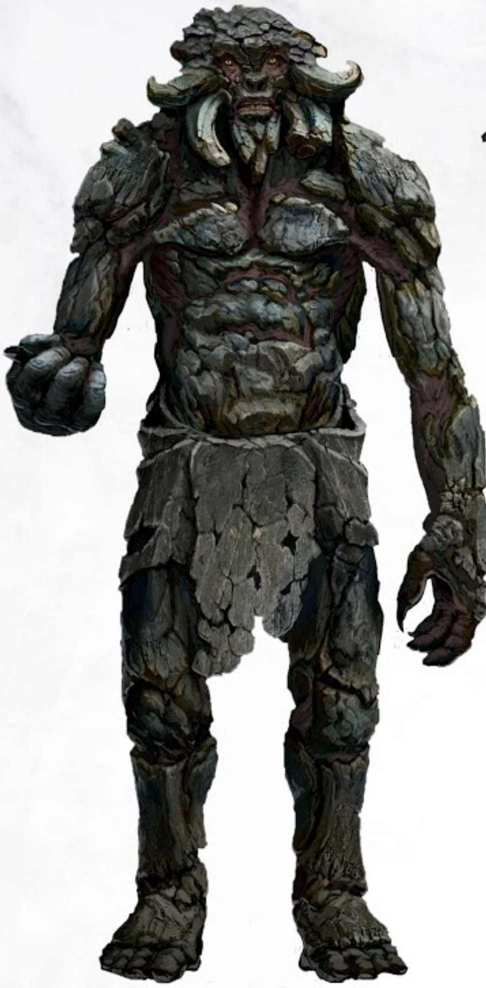


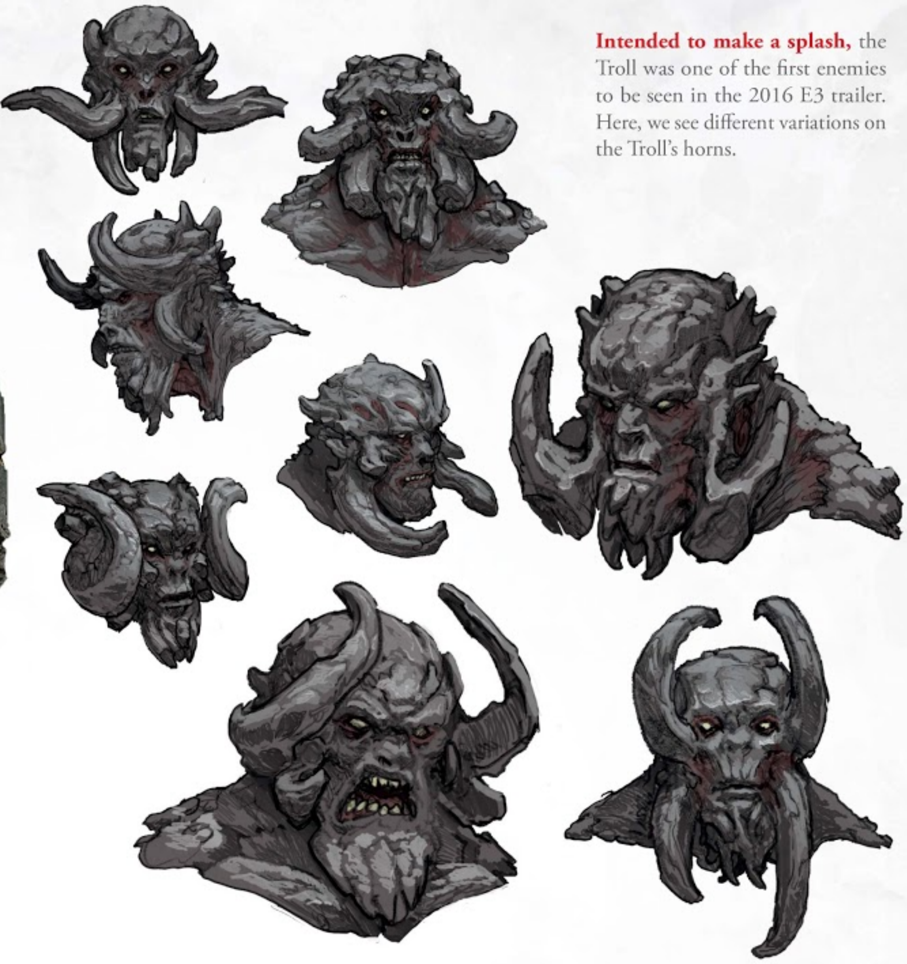
Trolls are another race of creatures roaming the world of *God of War*. "We explored various looks for the Trolls, from very human-looking characters to more animalistic designs," said lead concept artist Dela Longfish. "There was a lot of talk about how they would attack in-game, as well as how intelligent they were. Vance Kovacs hit a great mix of these core ideas, and his design eventually became the driving direction of the character. The look was carried through base designs of the various elemental versions of the fire, stone, and ice Trolls."

Artists: Stephen Oakley (top and bottom); Dela Longfish (middle)

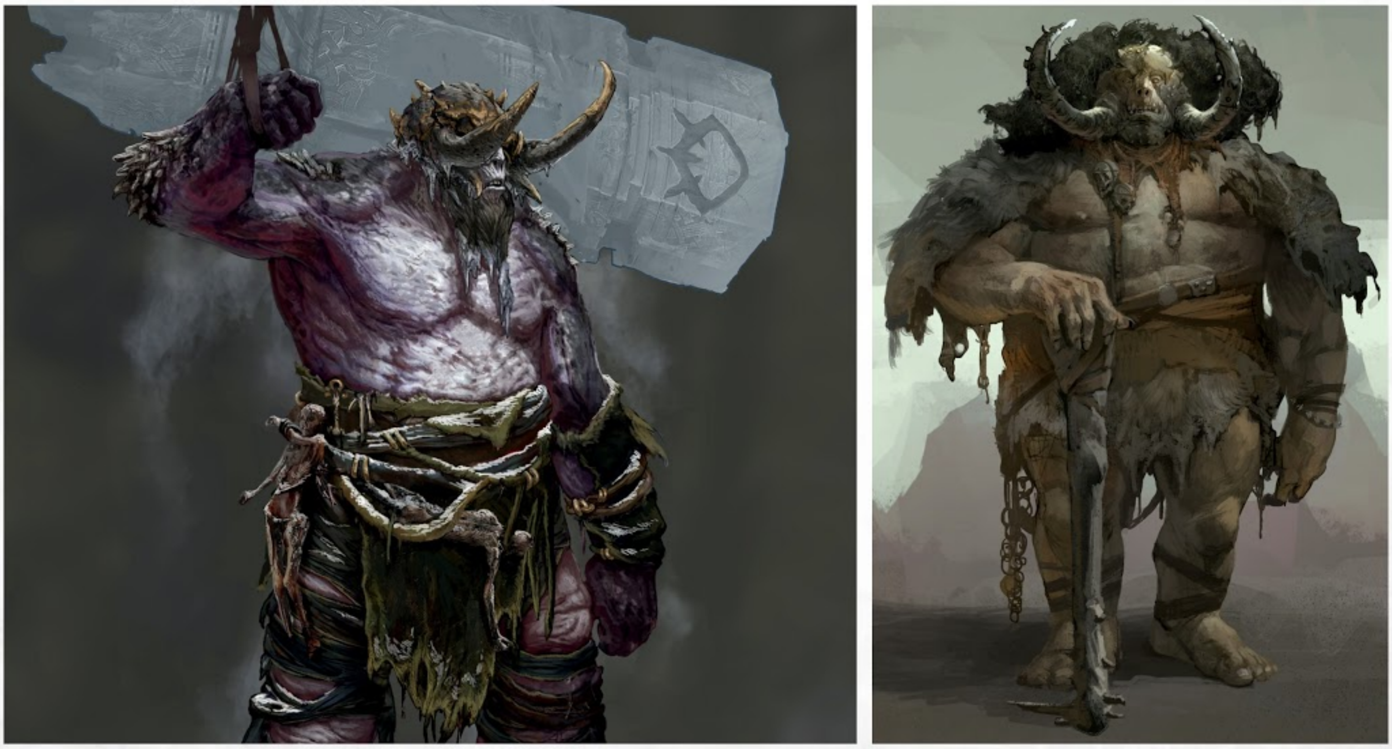








Intended to make a splash, the Troll was one of the first enemies to be seen in the 2016 E3 trailer. Here, we see different variations on the Troll's horns.



Further explorations on Troll variations. Artists: Vance Kovacs (bottom right); Stephen Oakley

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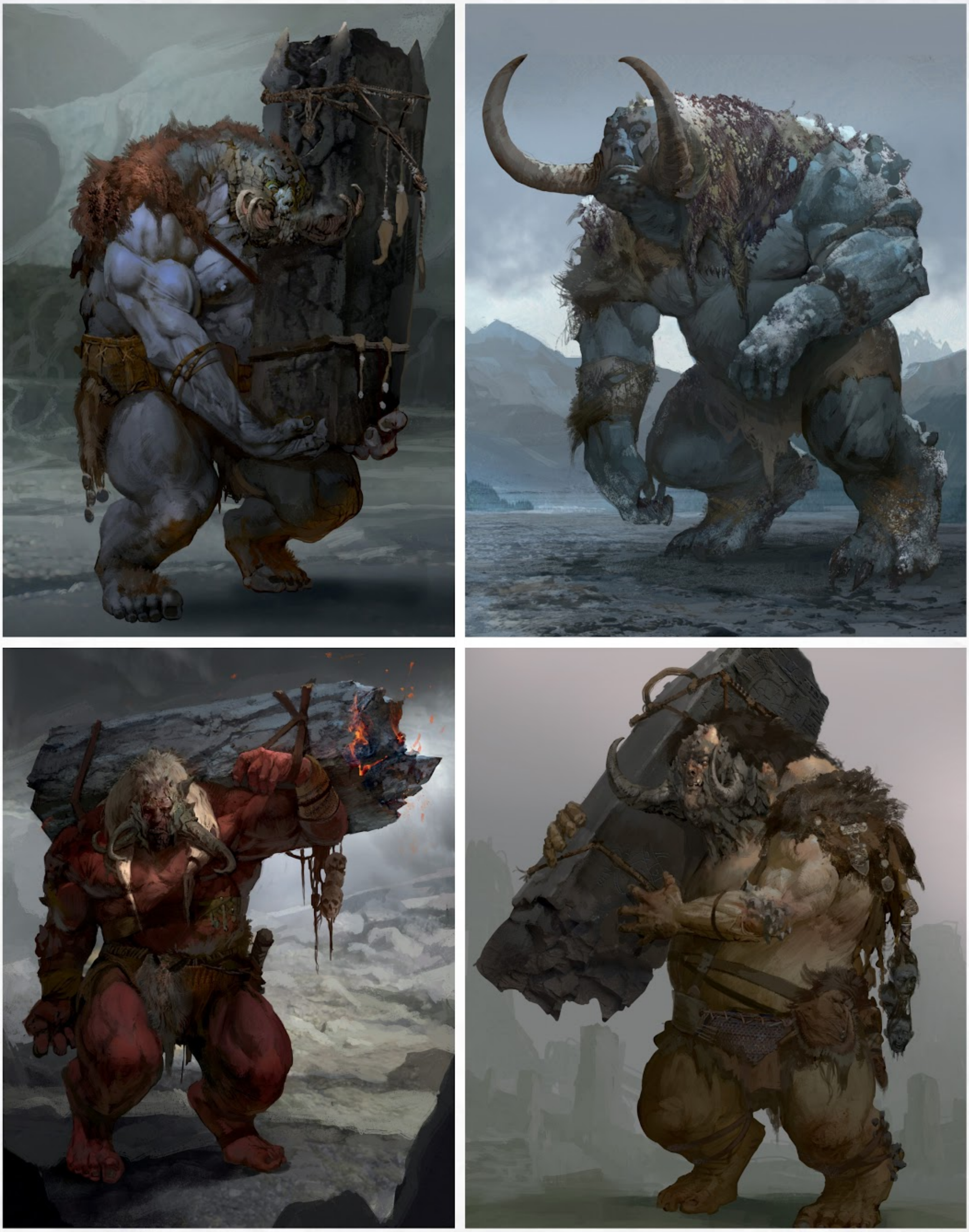
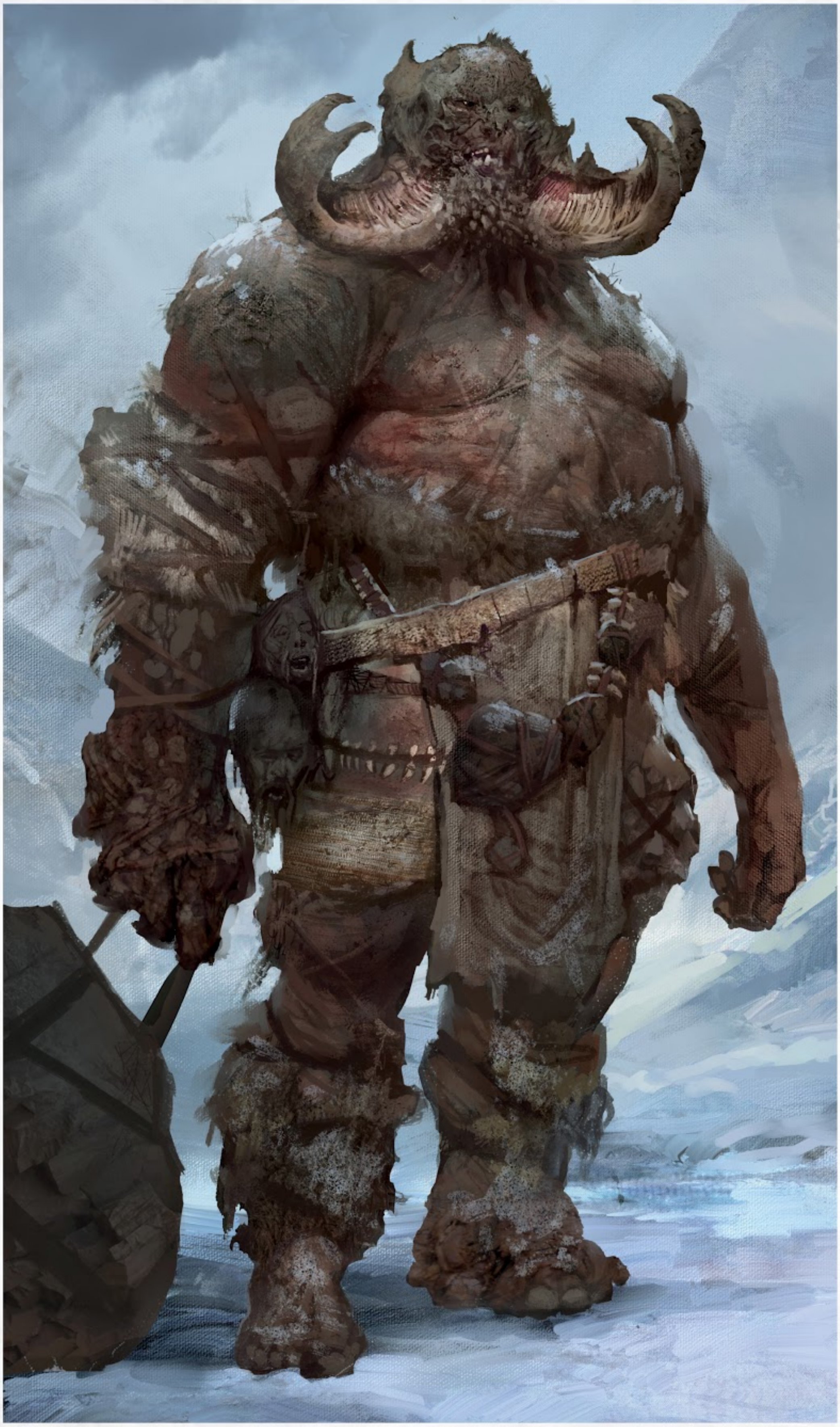


Infusing the elements of fire, ice, and rock into the character. Artist: Vance Kovacs



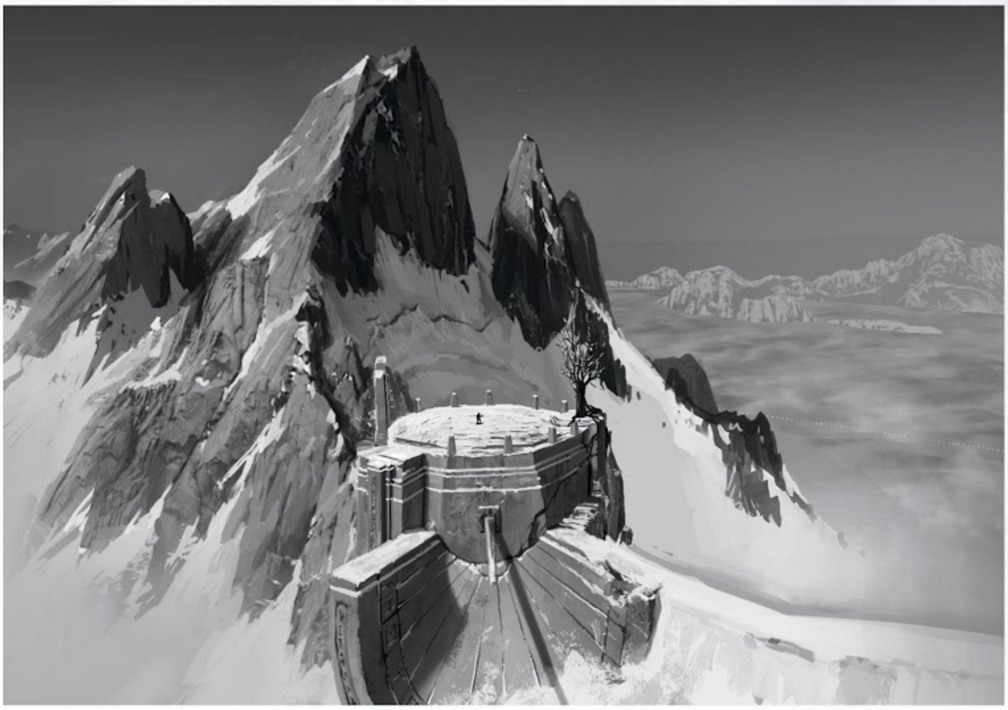
Artist: Vance Kovacs

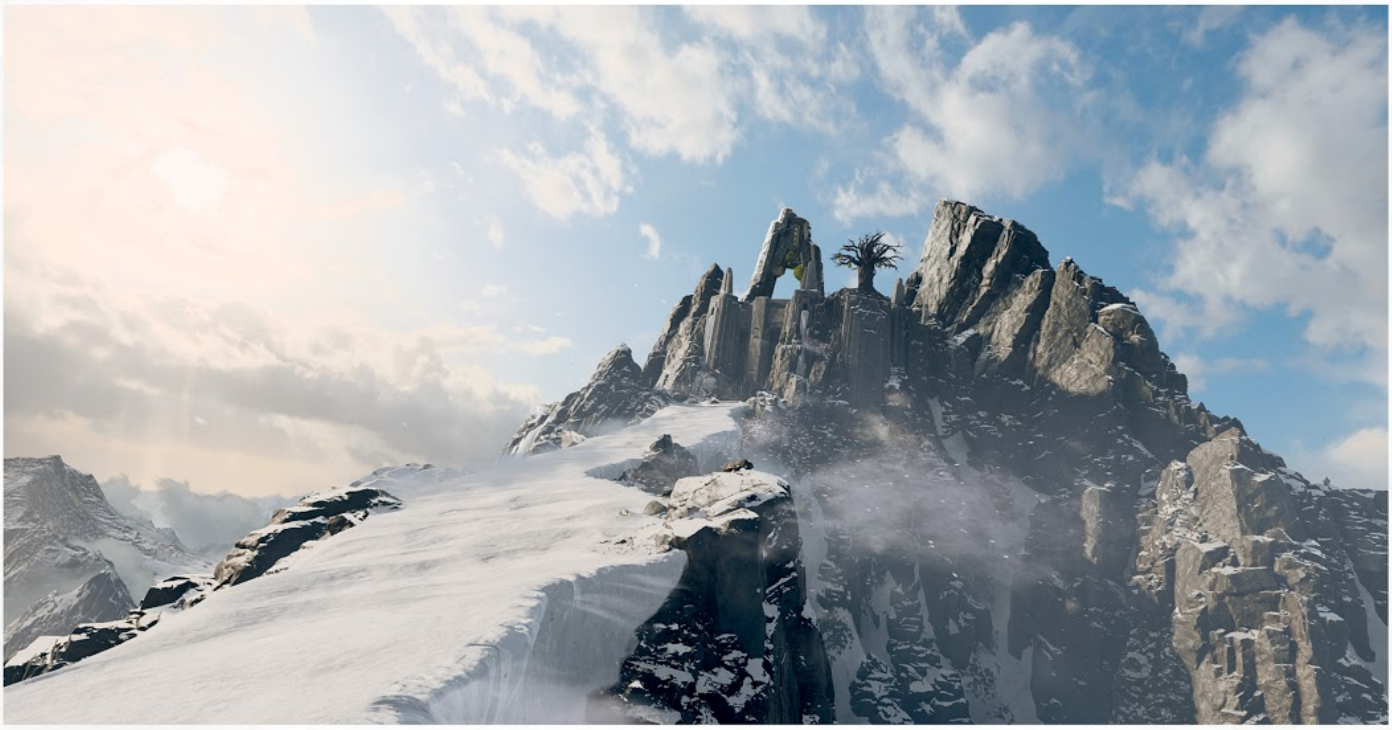
"We wanted to put our own unique spin on Trolls, which have, of course, been done to death over the years," said concept artist Stephen Oakley. "We pushed them into more ape-like territory, augmented with tusks which hint that they came from a time when mammoths still walked the Earth." The artists added thick, rhino-like skin and growths that matched the sort of magic one might see from these beast's attacks—the magic of which originates from the markers they carry around in a strange, but potent, symbiotic relationship."

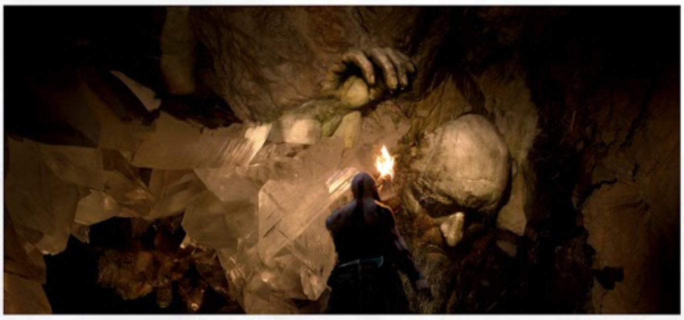
"To create our own type of mythology for the characters in our world we put thought into their backstory and imagine who they are and where they might come from. With the Trolls there was an idea that as they wandered the world they would collect or hoard things they come upon. Whether it was shiny, broken swords, rune stones, or animal bones, each Troll has their favorite things to hoard. The team also liked the idea that the Trolls have intelligence, and we represented this by having them be able to speak their own language, as seen in the 2016 E3 trailer."

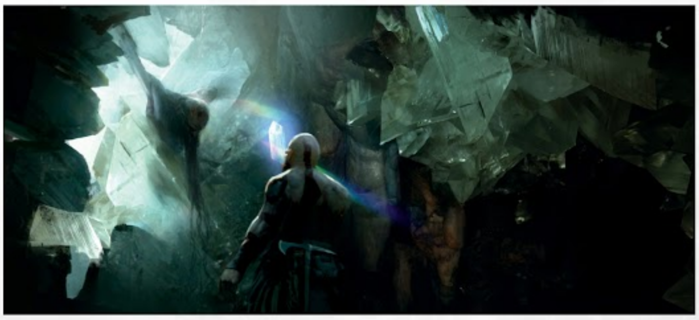
The summit of the mountain serves as a constant goal for the player as they work their way through Midgard, and was a major point of focus for creative director Cory Barlog. Here we see just a fraction of the visual work that went into creating the summit.

The henge at the top of the mountain served as the backdoor into Jötunheim, hidden away and locked inside a magical bubble of springtime. Senior concept artist Mark Castanon conceptualized that the giants spilled some seeds as they were leaving through this backdoor, and caused an abundance of supernatural growth at the very top of the mountain.

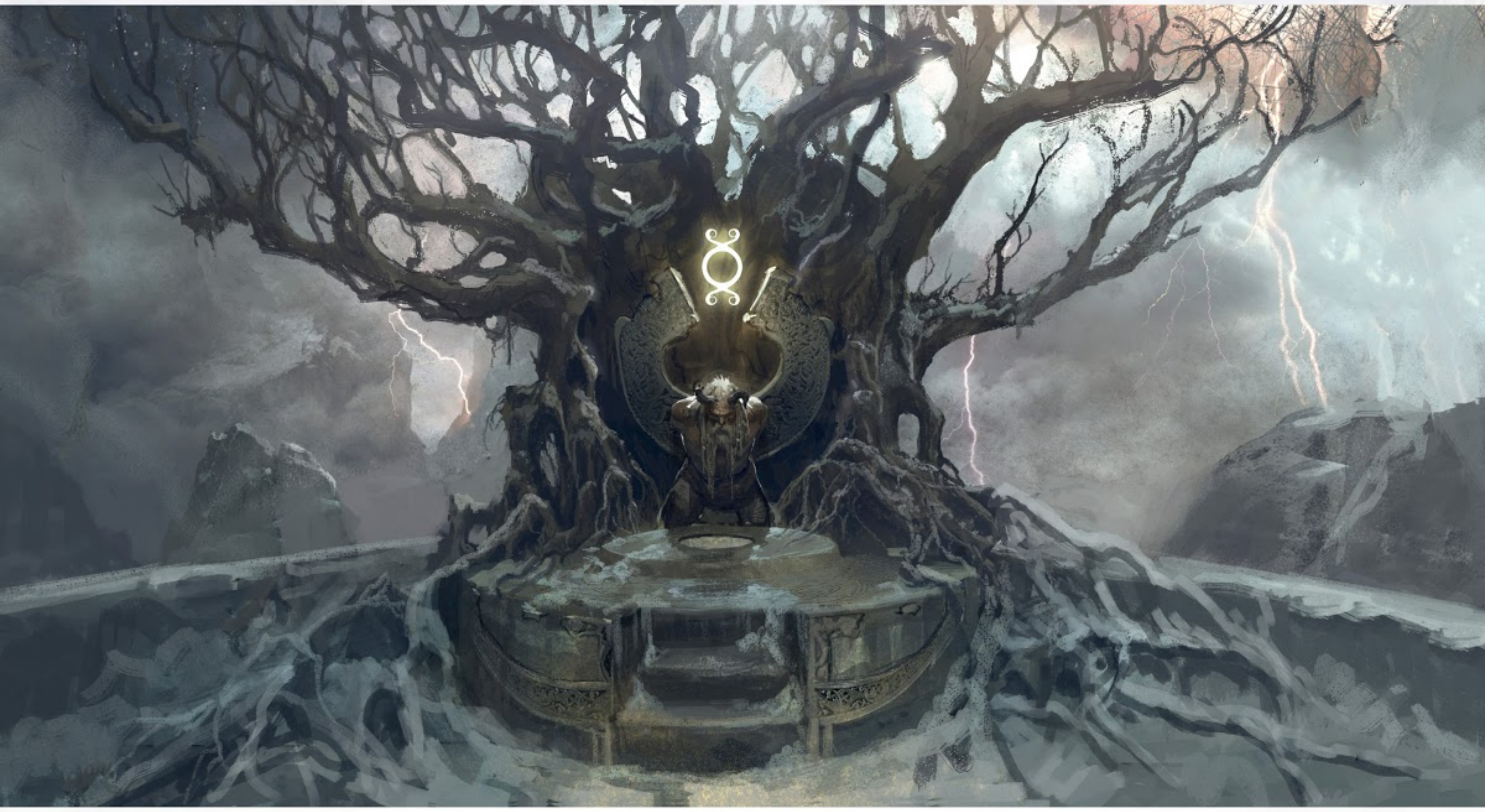


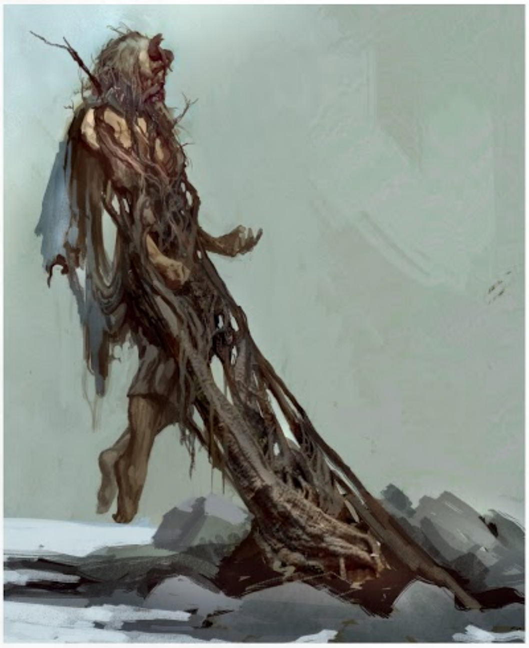


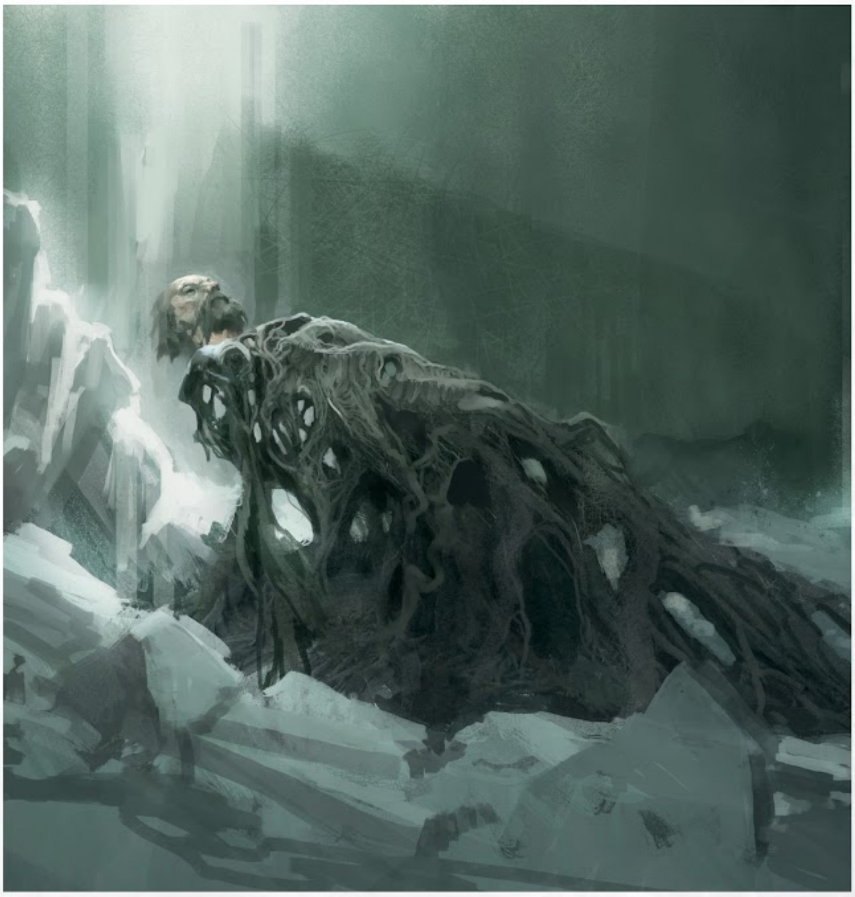




The highest point of Midgard. Artists: José Cabrera (bottom); Paul Coda, Timo Pihlajamaki, Raul Aparicio, Mariusz Wiehec (middle); Mark Castanon (top, opposite)

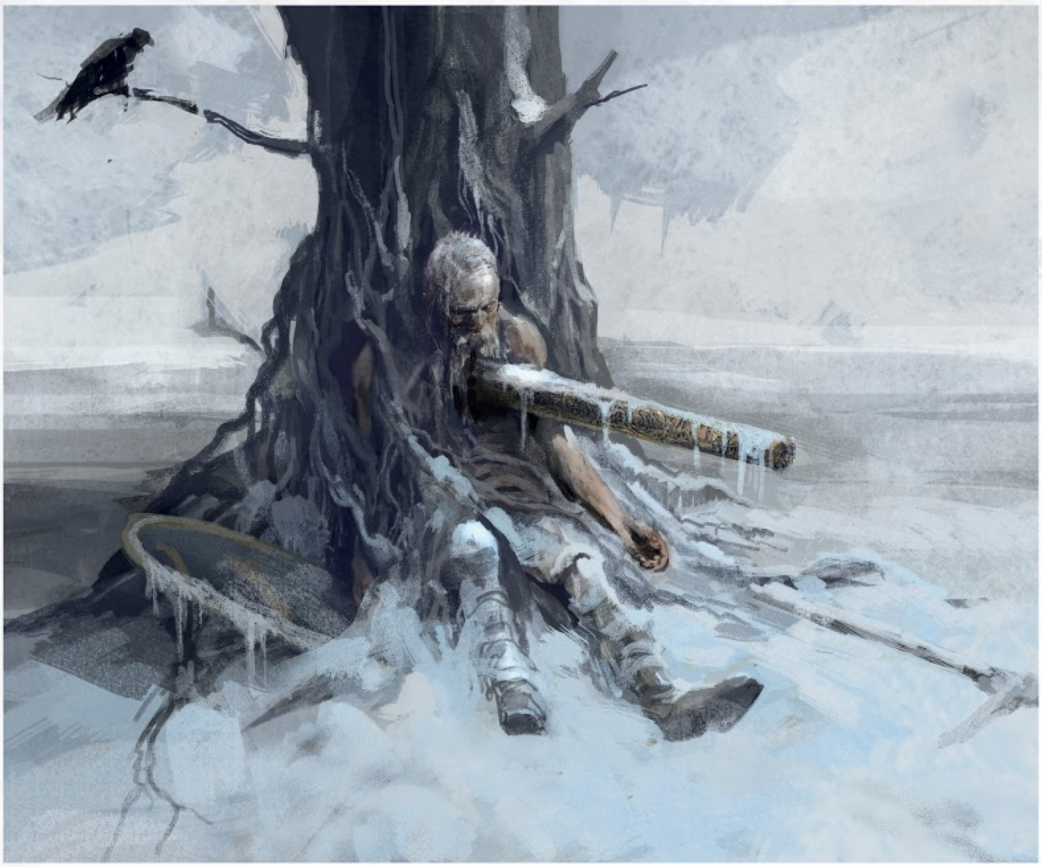






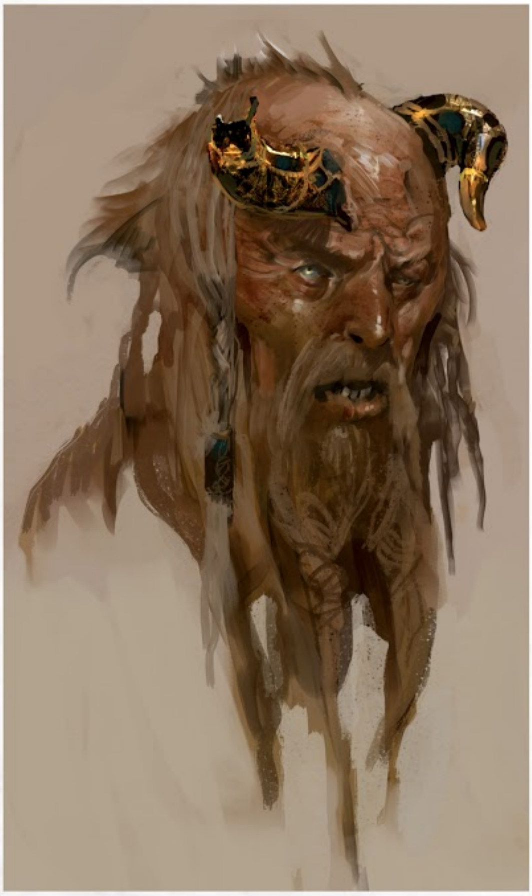
Mimir is a god of immense wisdom. Too valuable to kill, Odin has imprisoned him here and often takes council from him. In order to ensure Mimir's truthfulness, Odin has enchanted his tongue and mind, so he can never lie. These were some of the early options the team entertained when exploring the form Mimir's prison would take.

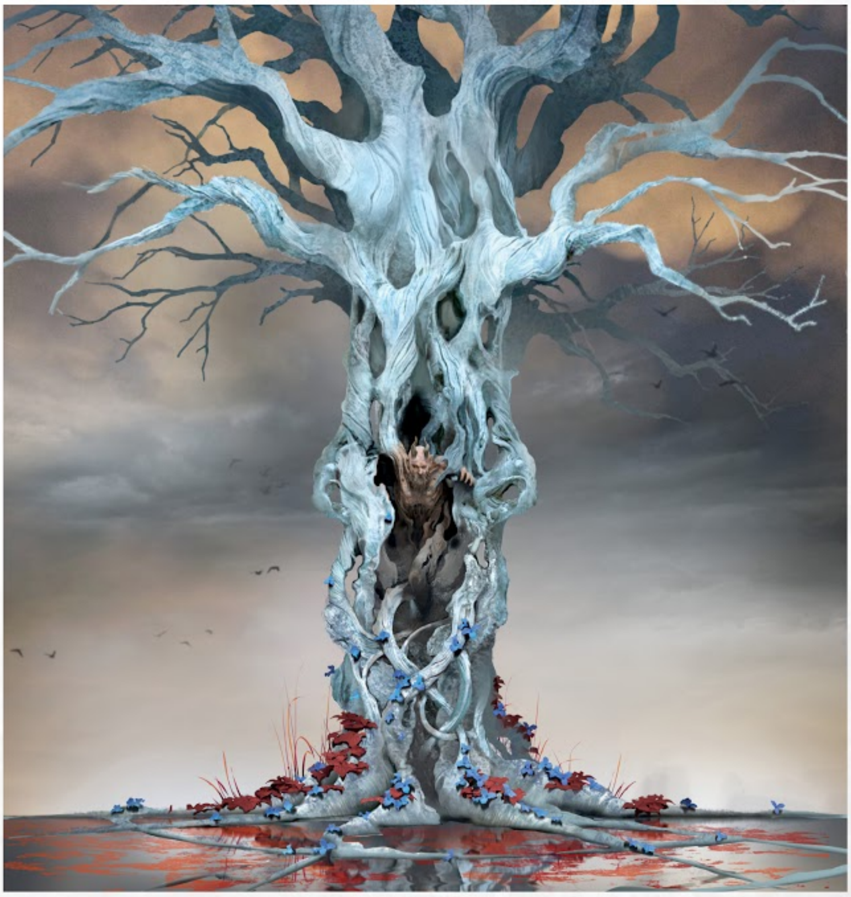
Mimir—imprisoned god. Artist: Vance Kovacs



Because Mimir's head is the only part of his body that the player sees through most of the game, the team had to make sure that it was able to tell his entire story.

Mimir's gilded horns and glowing eye allude to his high stature prior to his imprisonment, as well as his magical ability; his long beard indicates the length of his captivity; and his eye is missing to demonstrate the torture he underwent while trapped inside the tree.

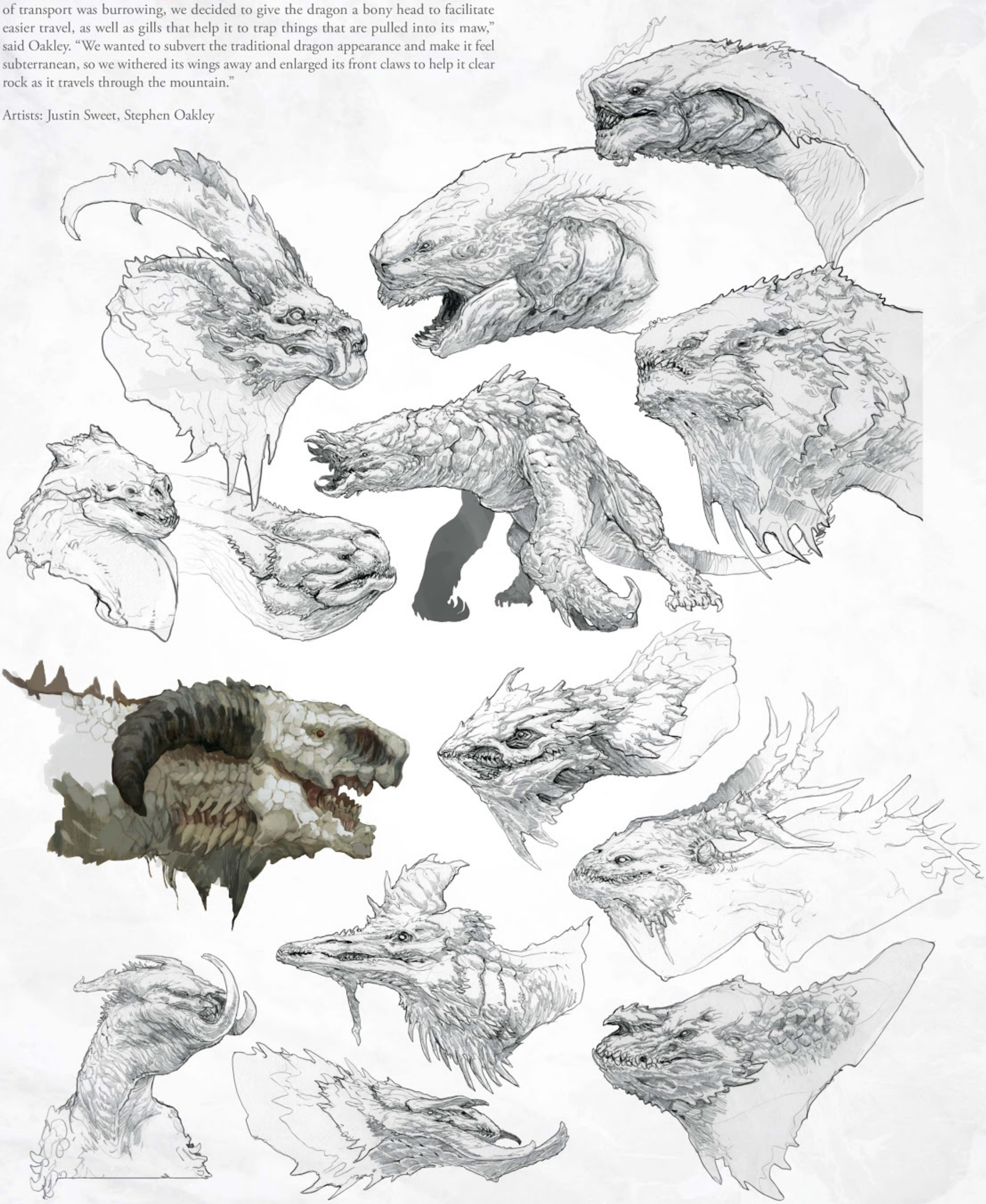


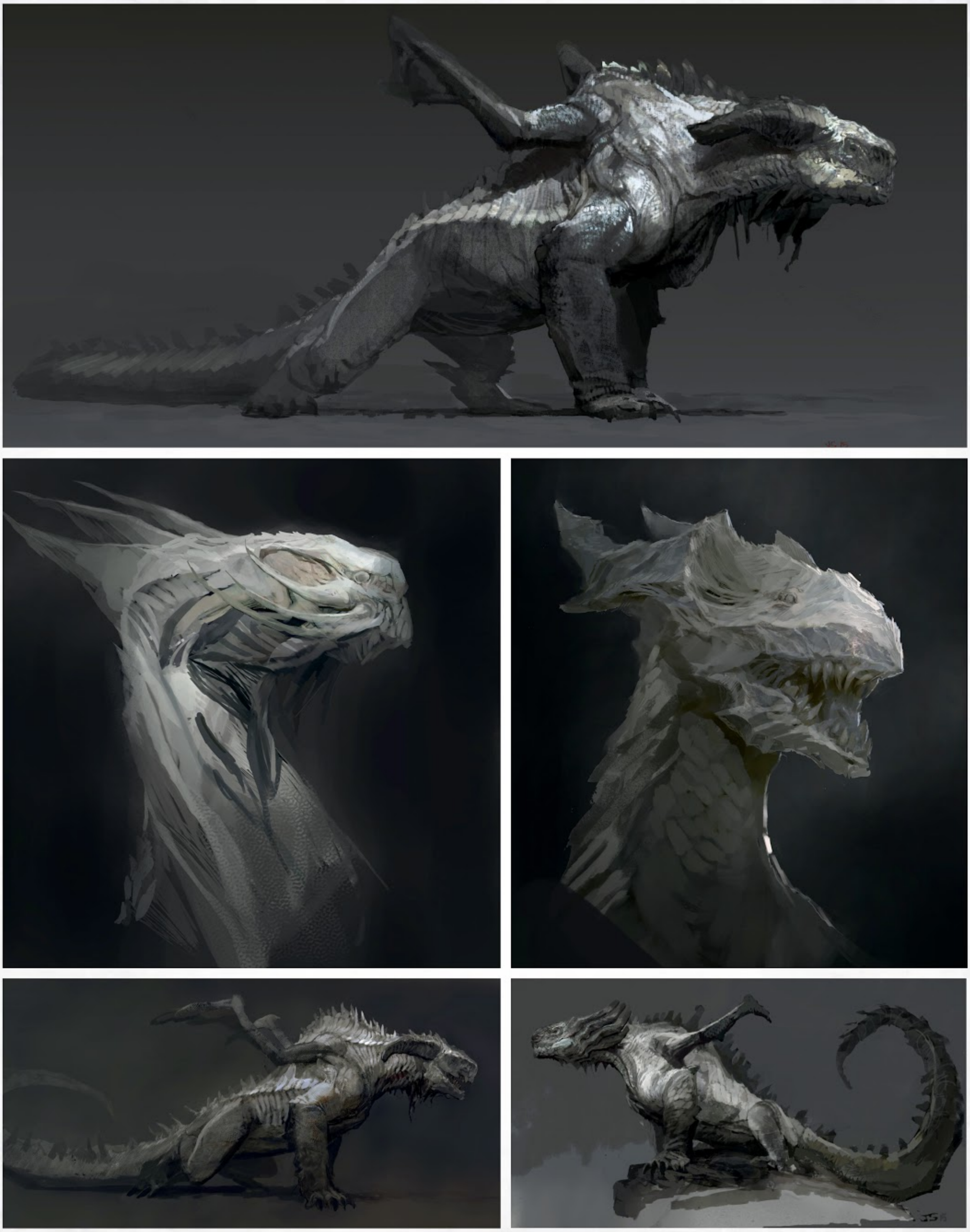


Artists: Dela Longfish (bottom right); Vance Kovacs

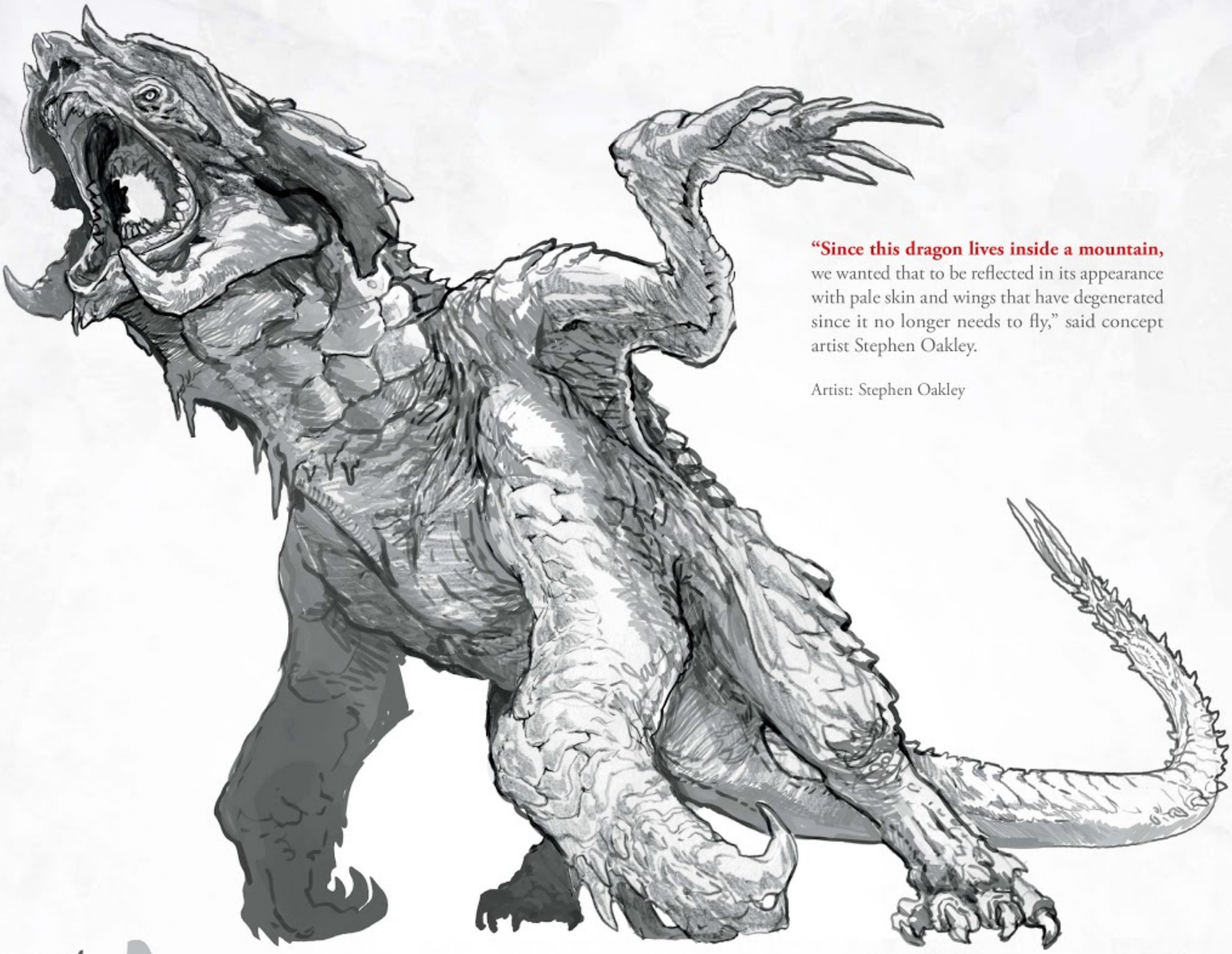
"We wanted the dragon's appearance to reflect its purpose, and since its main mode of transport was burrowing, we decided to give the dragon a bony head to facilitate easier travel, as well as gills that help it to trap things that are pulled into its maw," said Oakley. "We wanted to subvert the traditional dragon appearance and make it feel subterranean, so we withered its wings away and enlarged its front claws to help it clear rock as it travels through the mountain."

Artists: Justin Sweet, Stephen Oakley



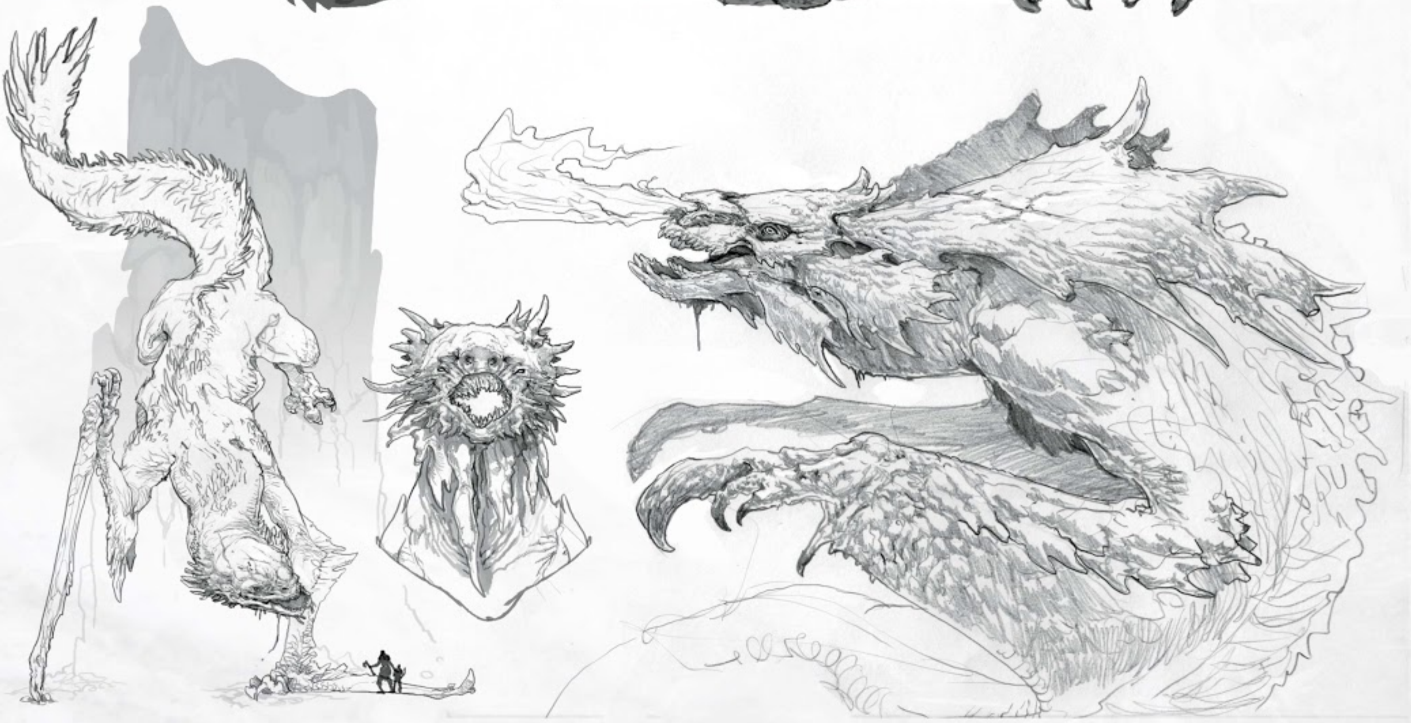


The dragon's seahorse-like webbing serves as a subterranean design element. Artist: Justin Sweet



“Since this dragon lives inside a mountain, we wanted that to be reflected in its appearance with pale skin and wings that have degenerated since it no longer needs to fly,” said concept artist Stephen Oakley.

Artist: Stephen Oakley



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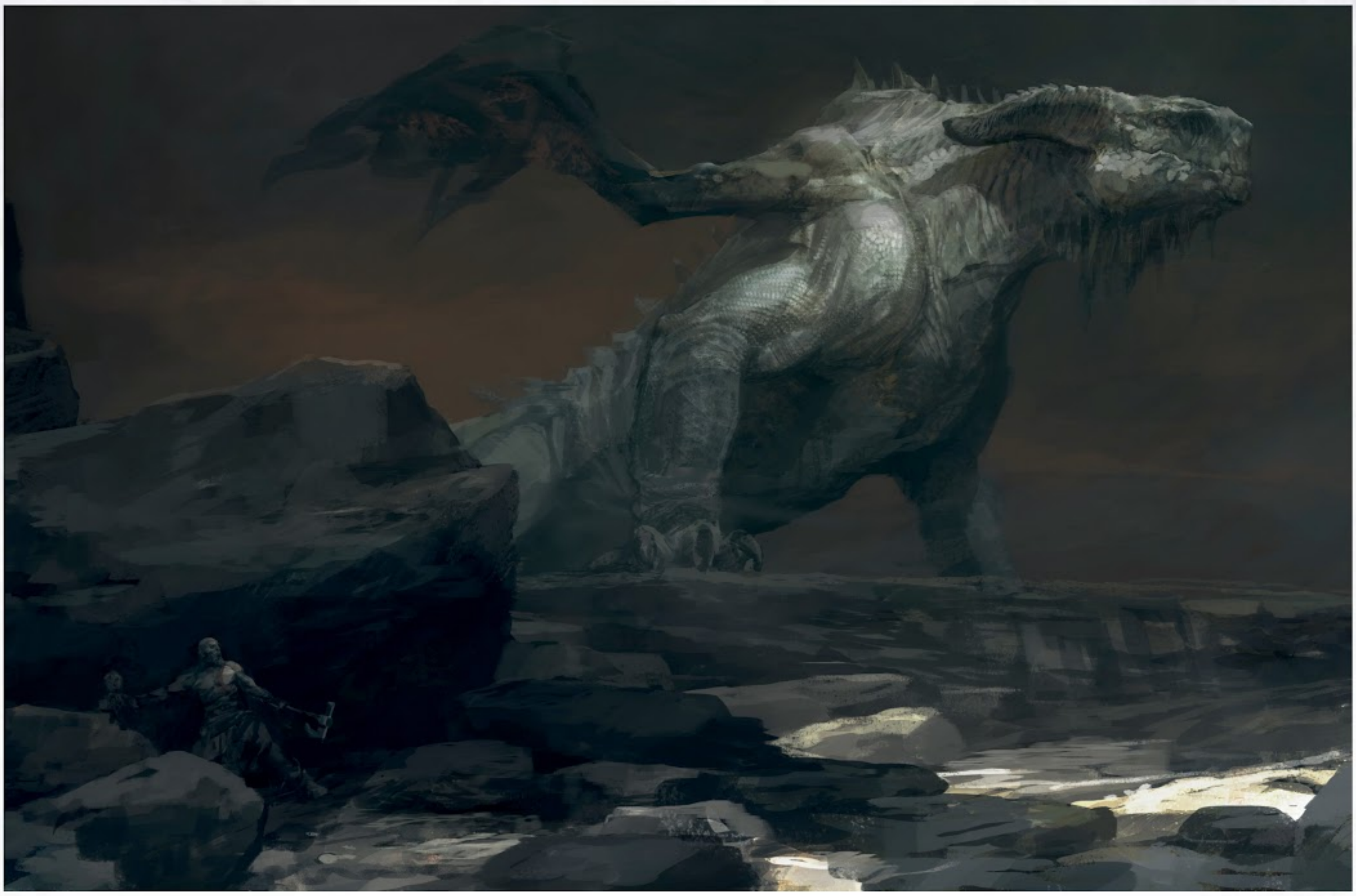
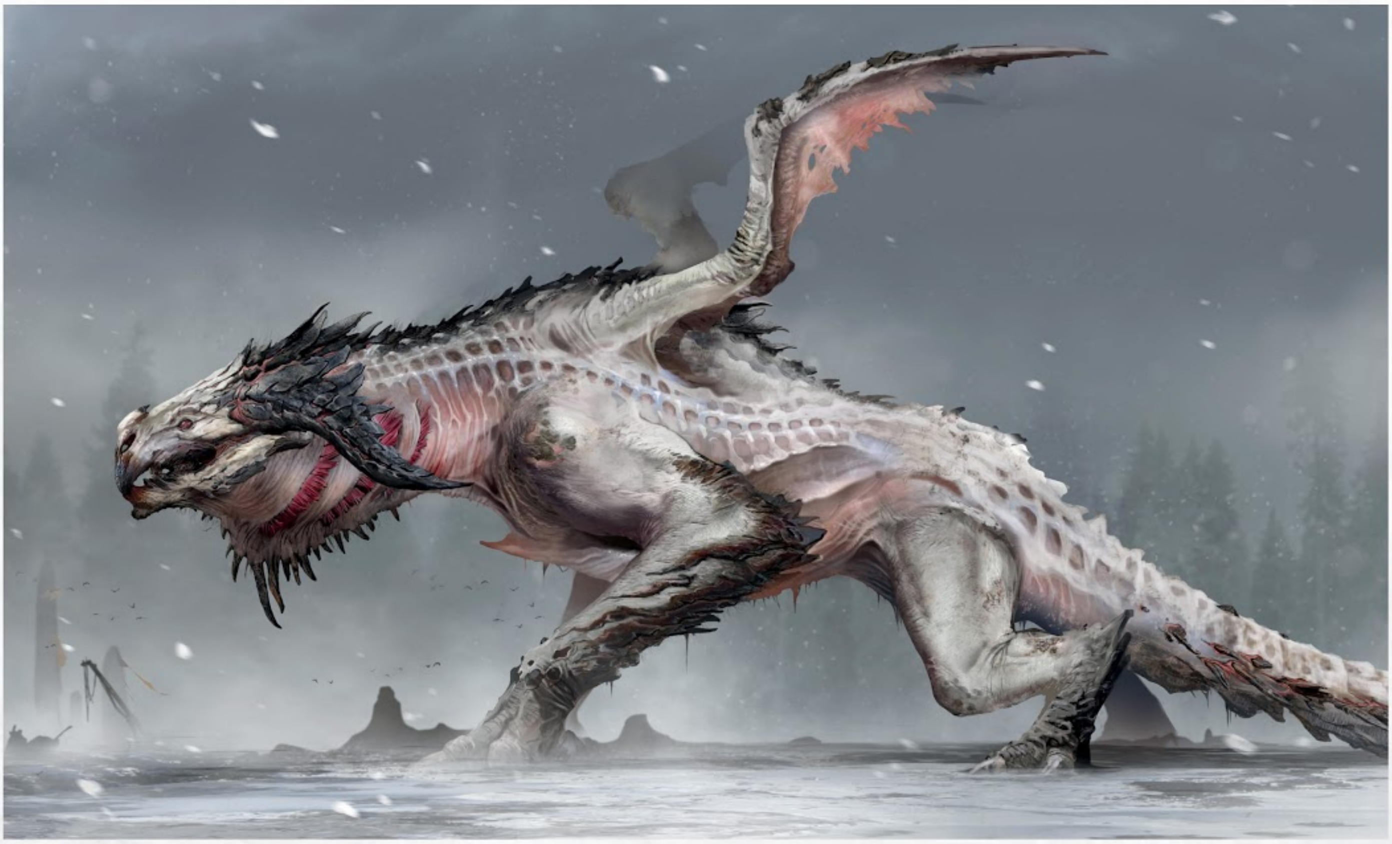
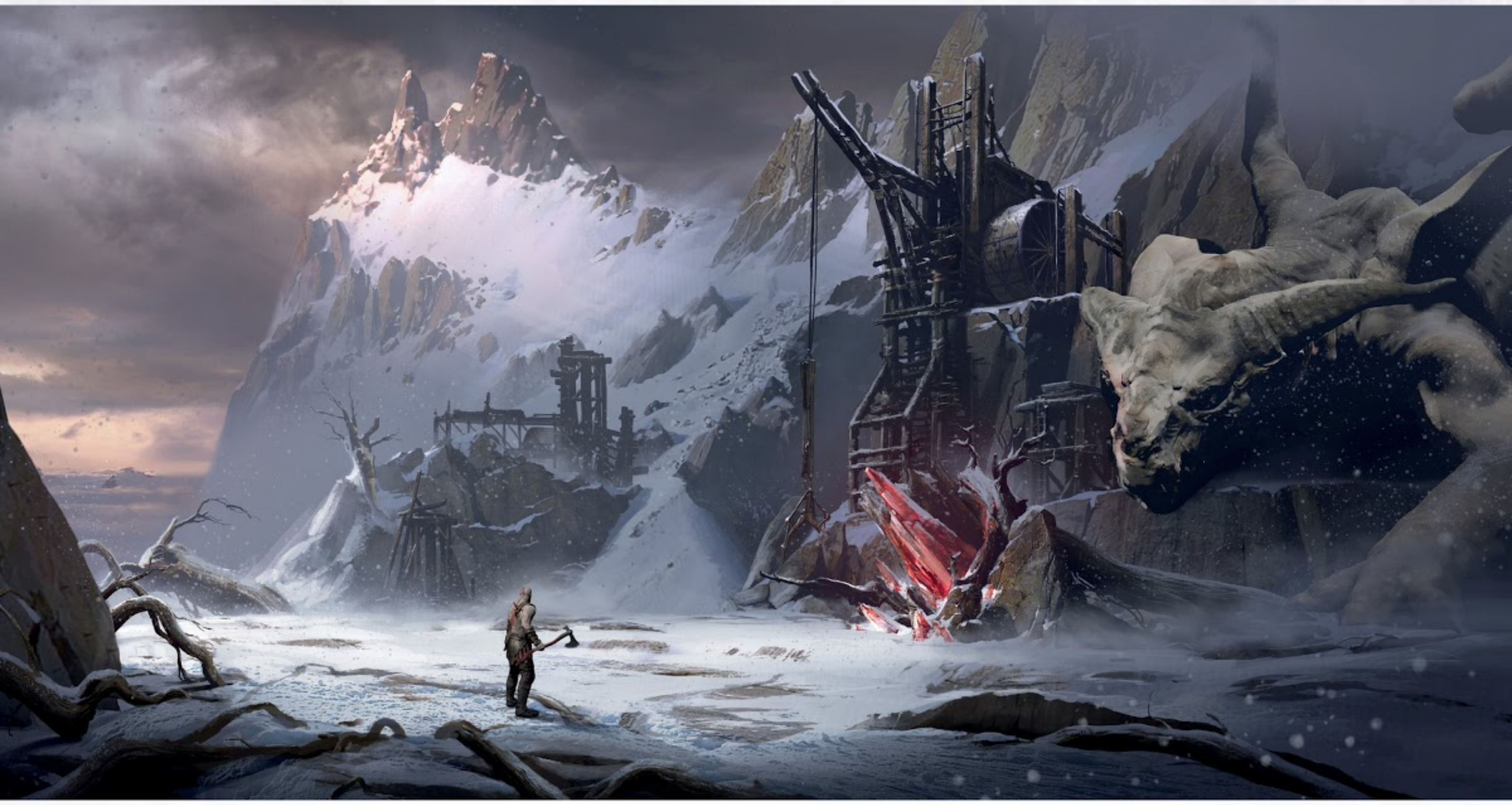
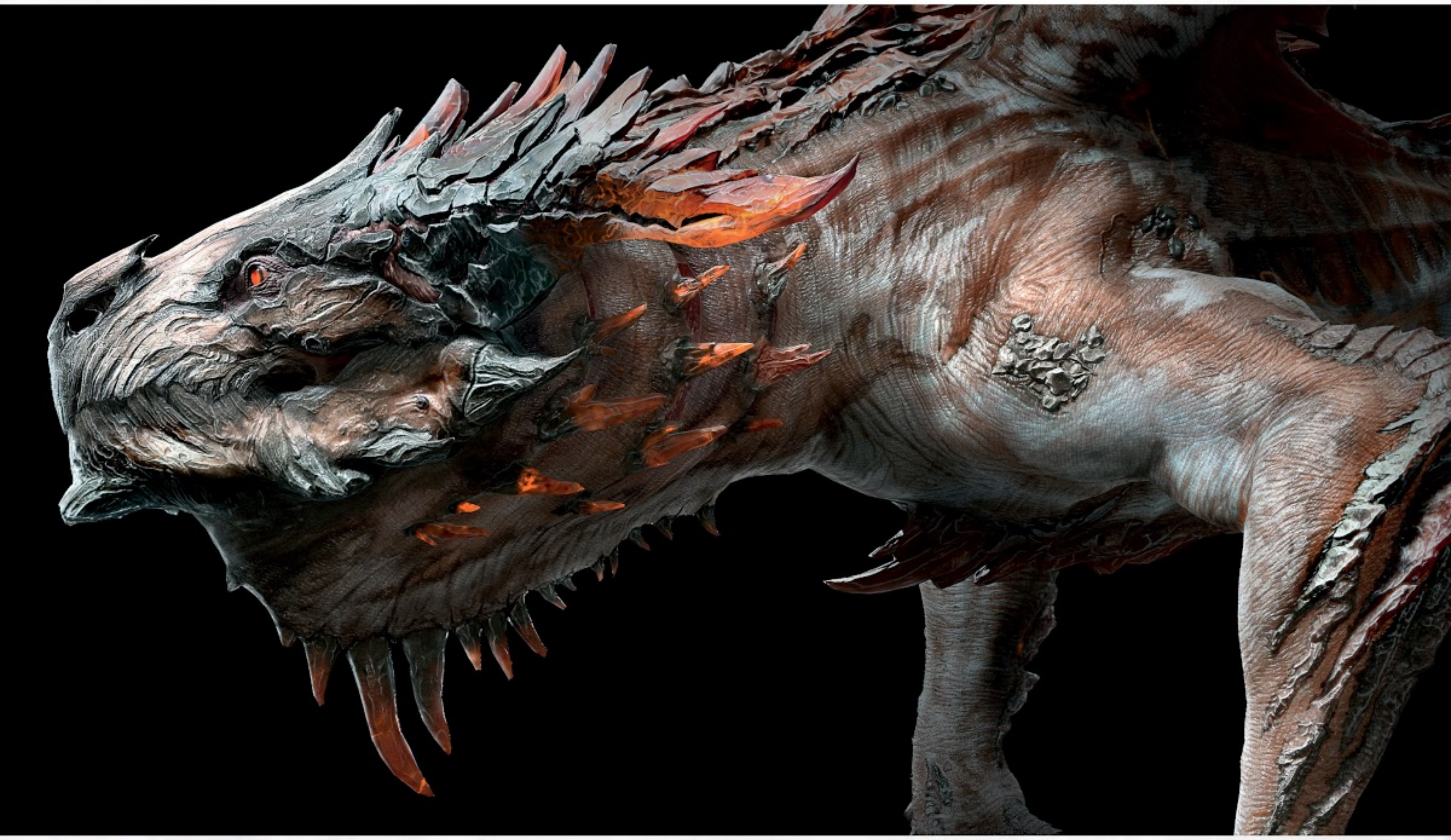


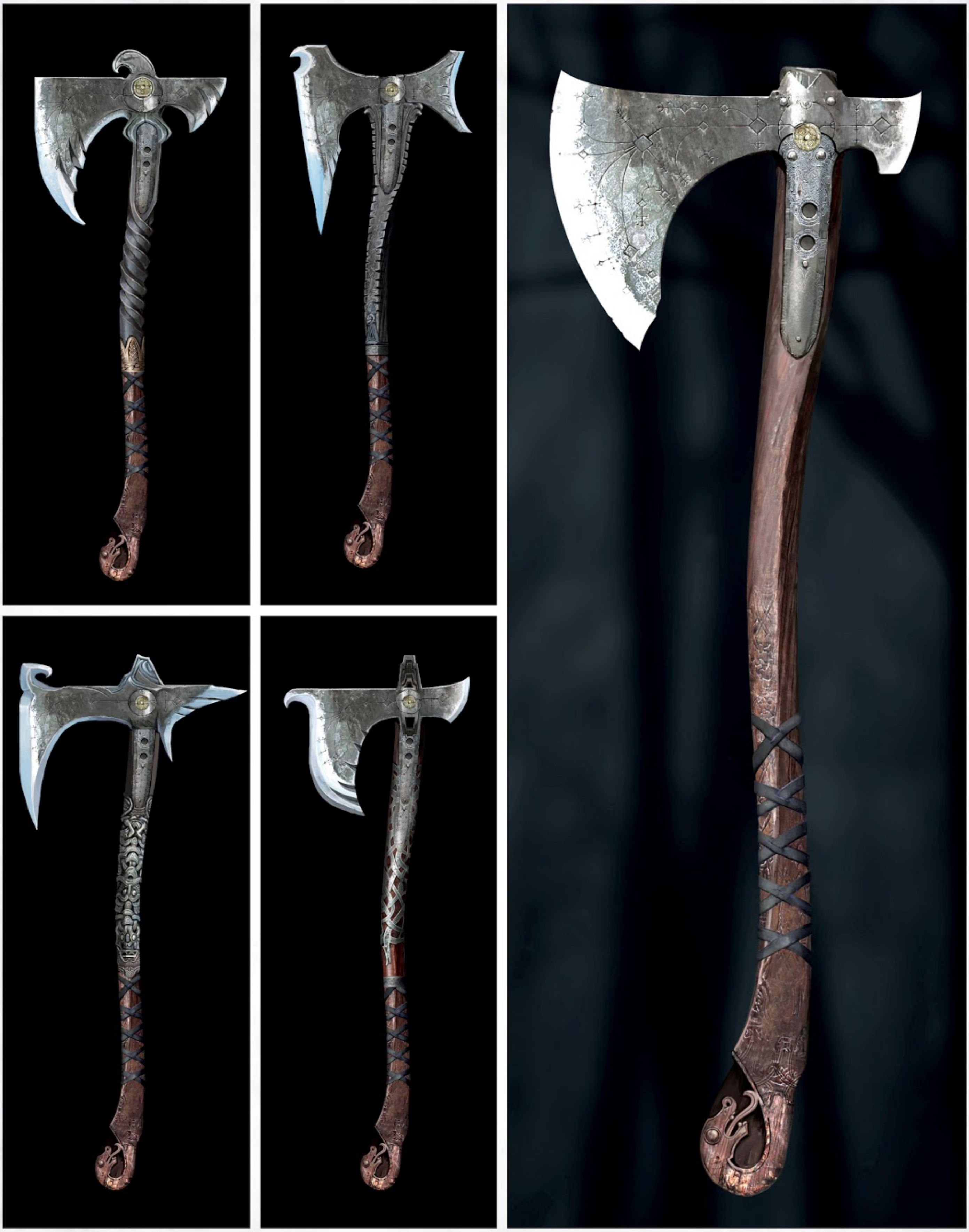


Finalizing the Hrælyr. Artists: Justin Sweet (top); Dela Longfish (bottom)

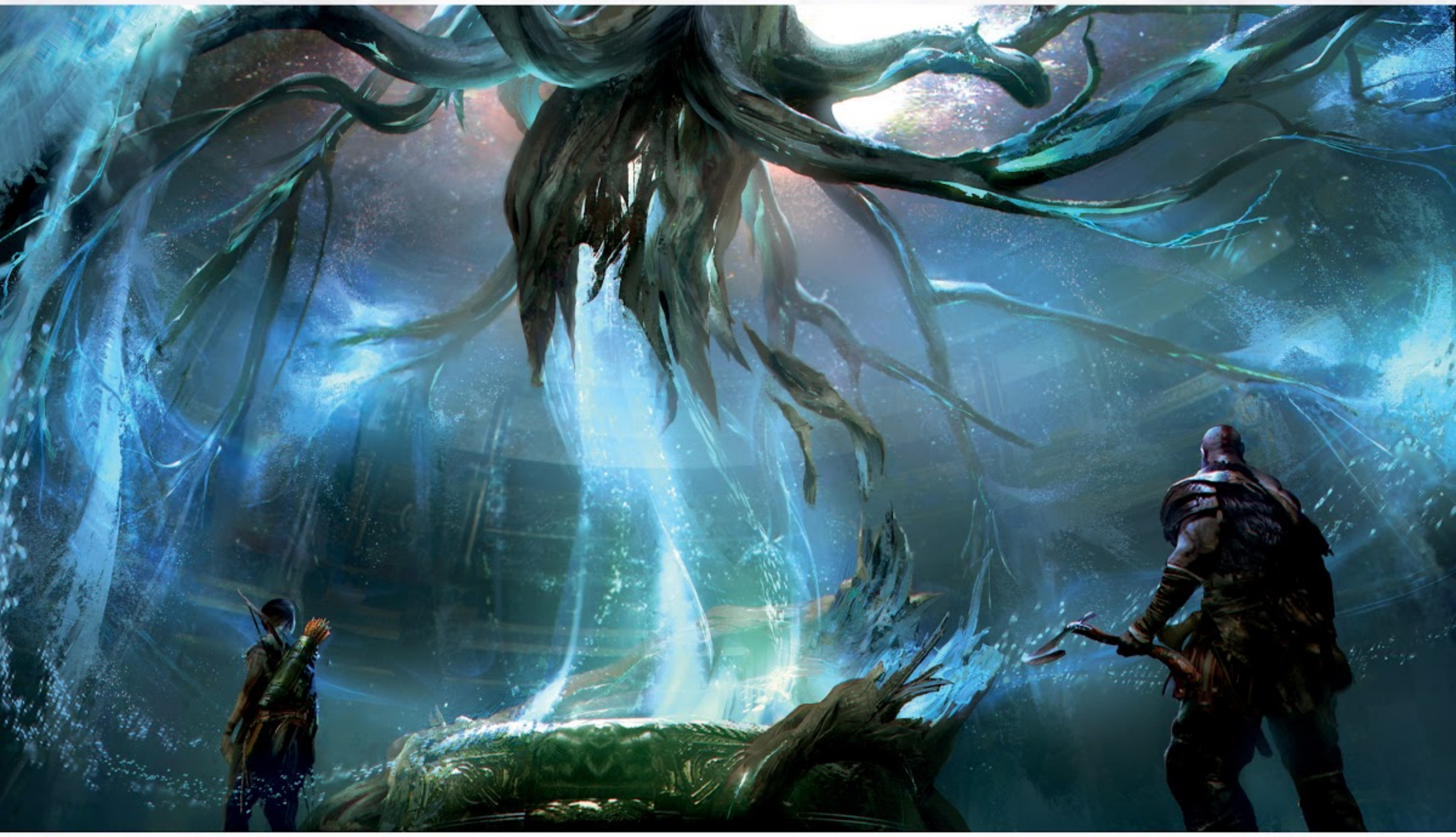




Hrælyr exploration and evolution. Artists: Mark Castanon (top); Glauco Longhi, Igor Catto (bottom)

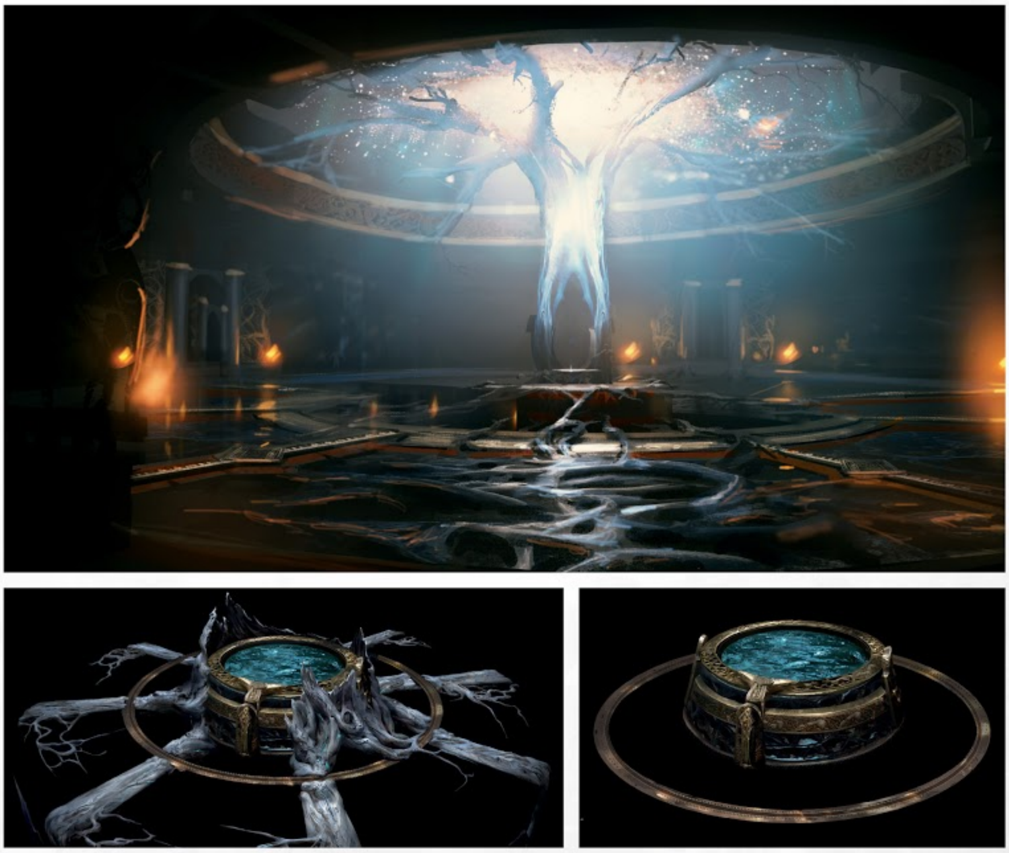


Final design of Leviathan Axe with upgrade exploration. Artists: Stephen Oakley (left); José Cabrera (right)

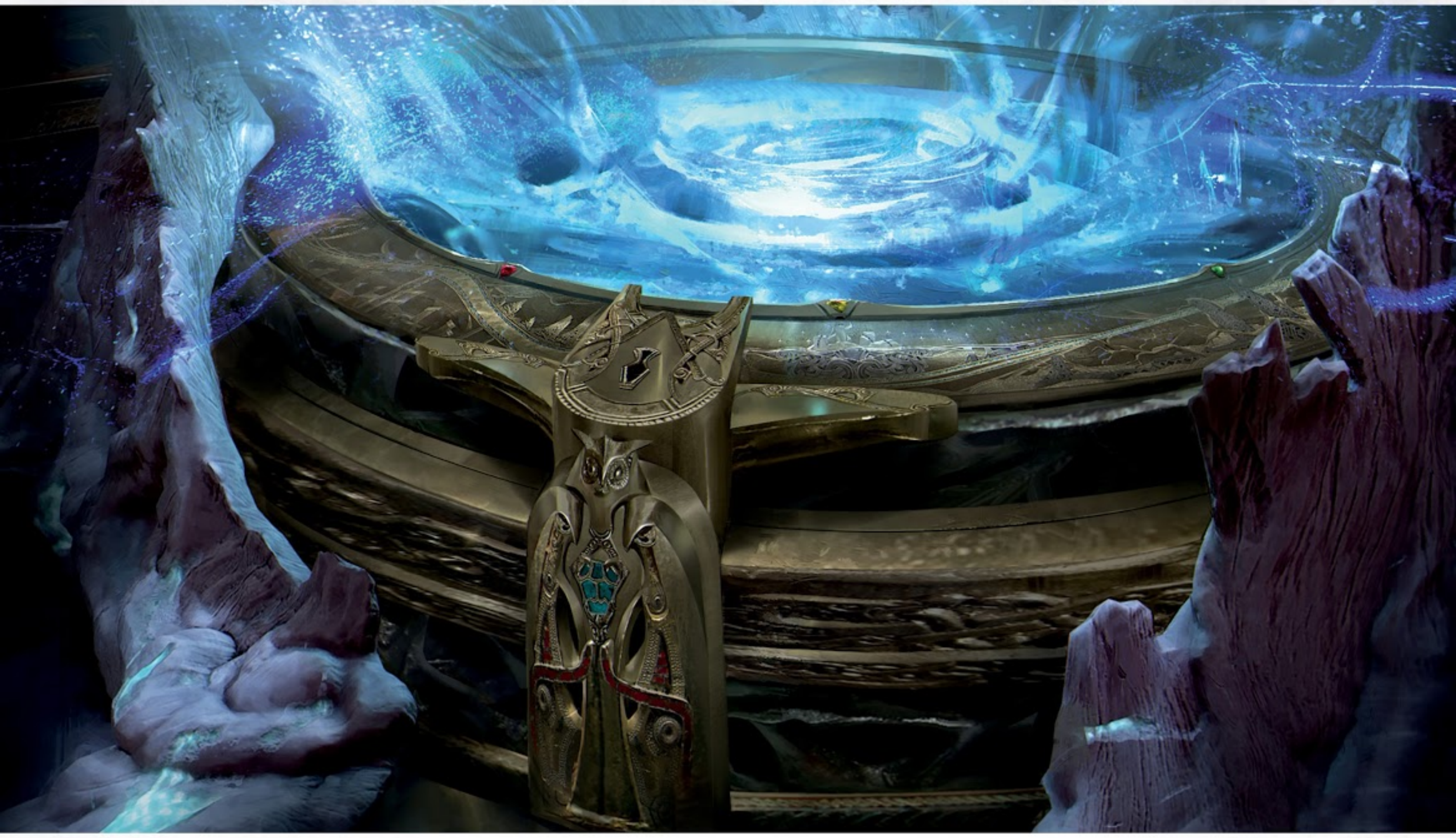


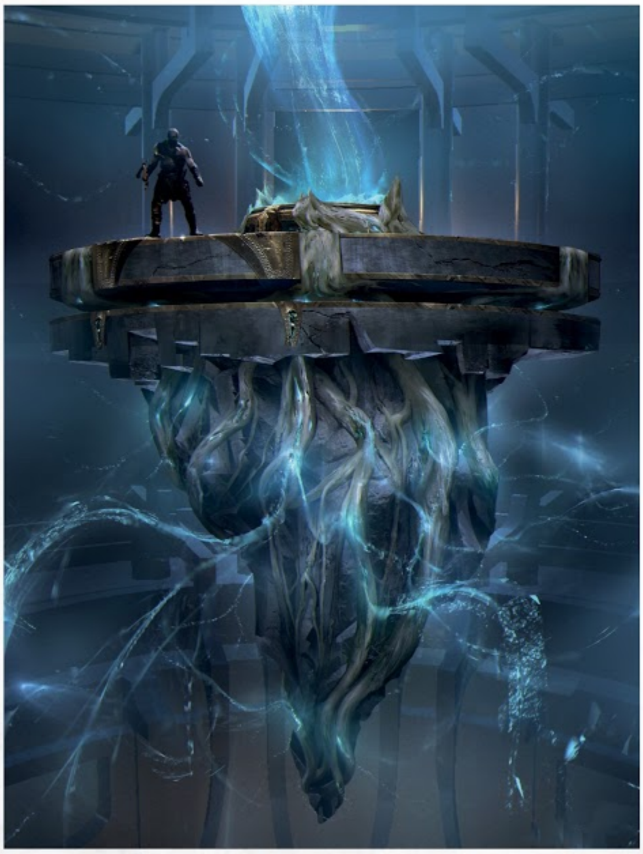
In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil is a mythical tree which grows out of the Lake of Nine, its branches interconnecting the various worlds. The challenge was to use this iconic piece of Norse mythology to justify a particular game play mechanic—in this case, using the tree's magic to travel between worlds.

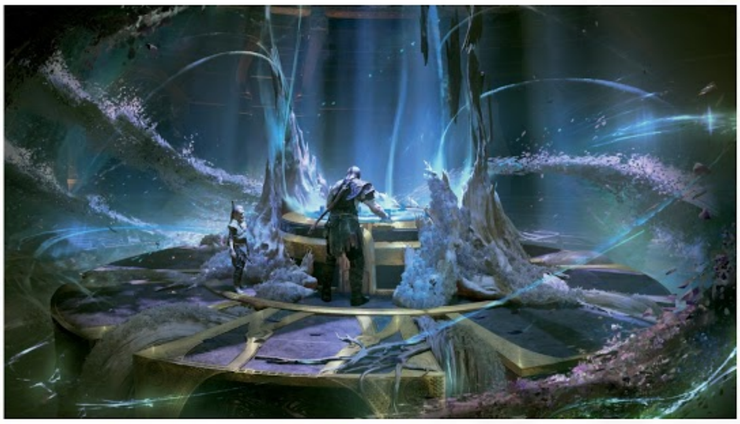
Aesthetically, the tree and the device required great physical presence, but also an ethereal connection to one another. The Lake of Nine and Yggdrasil go hand-in-hand with Nordic mythology, since both were thought to be ever-present in everything in existence. Taking this into account, the team brought both of these non-physical objects into existing physical forms. The brim of the well includes a sculptural depiction of all the different realms and its connection to the tree that travels between them. On the base of the pedestal, we can see three owl-like figures with the central figure being Urd; in their talons, the bluish shape represents the Bifröst, carried by the gods and used to travel between realms.

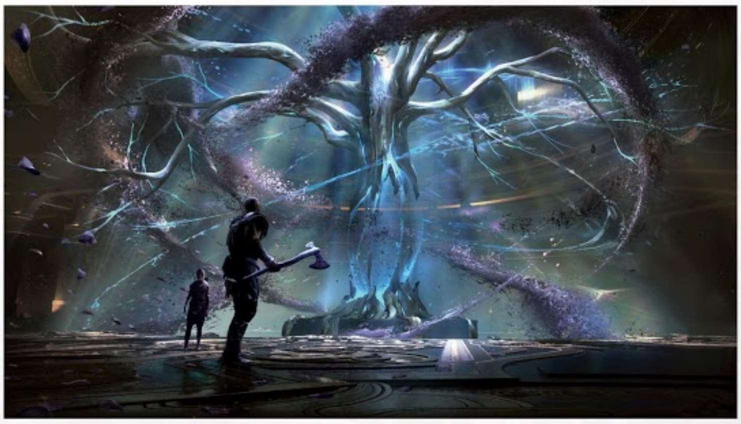


The realm travel room. Artists: Luke Berliner (middle); Abe Taraky









Artist: Abe Taraky

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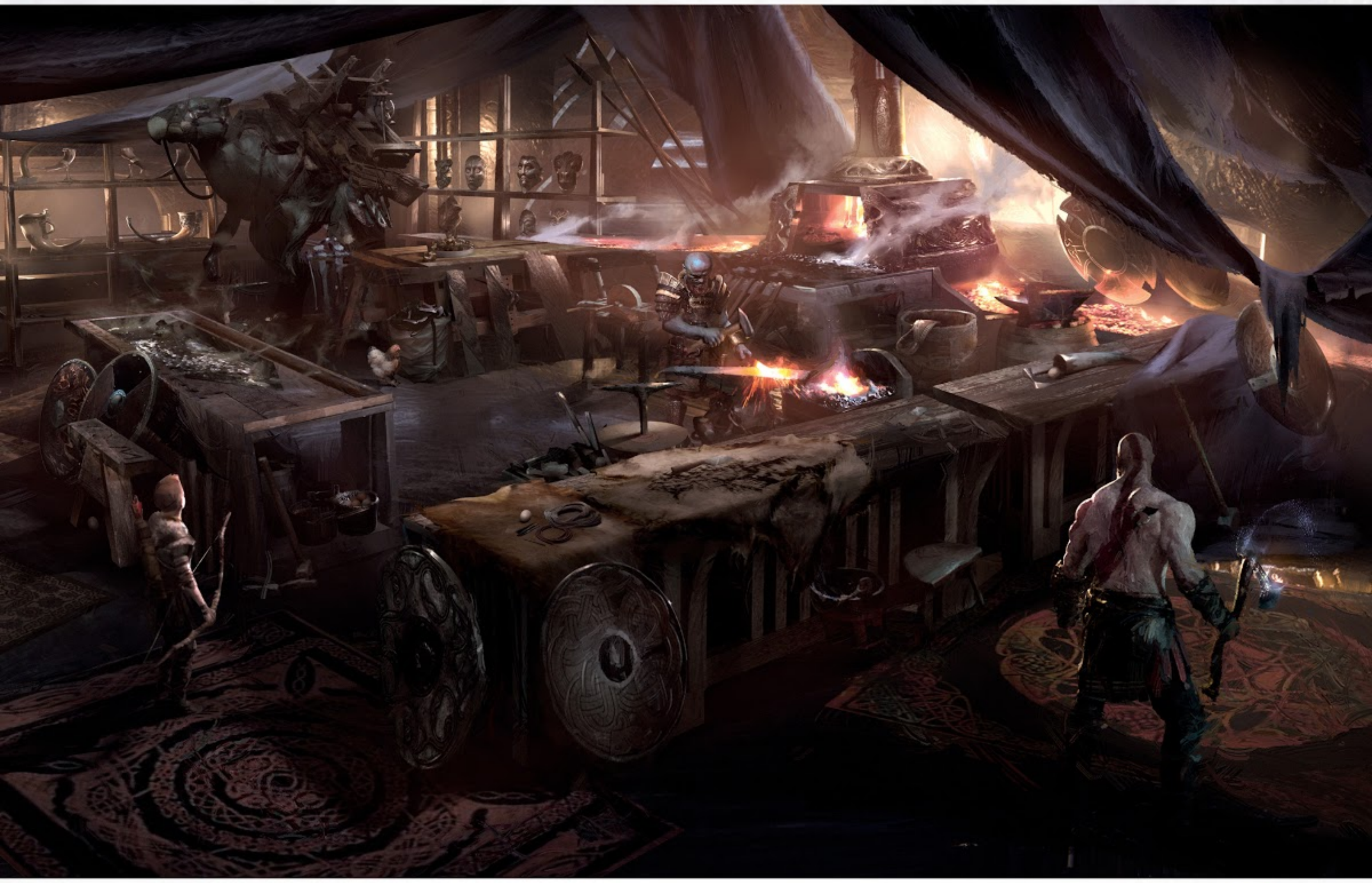
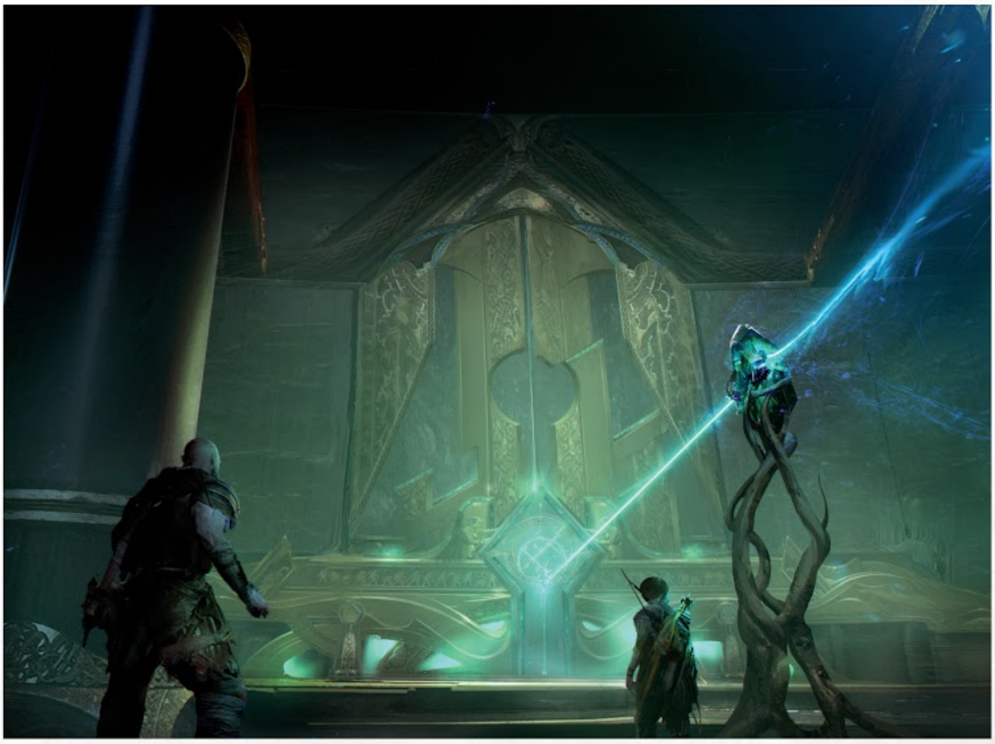
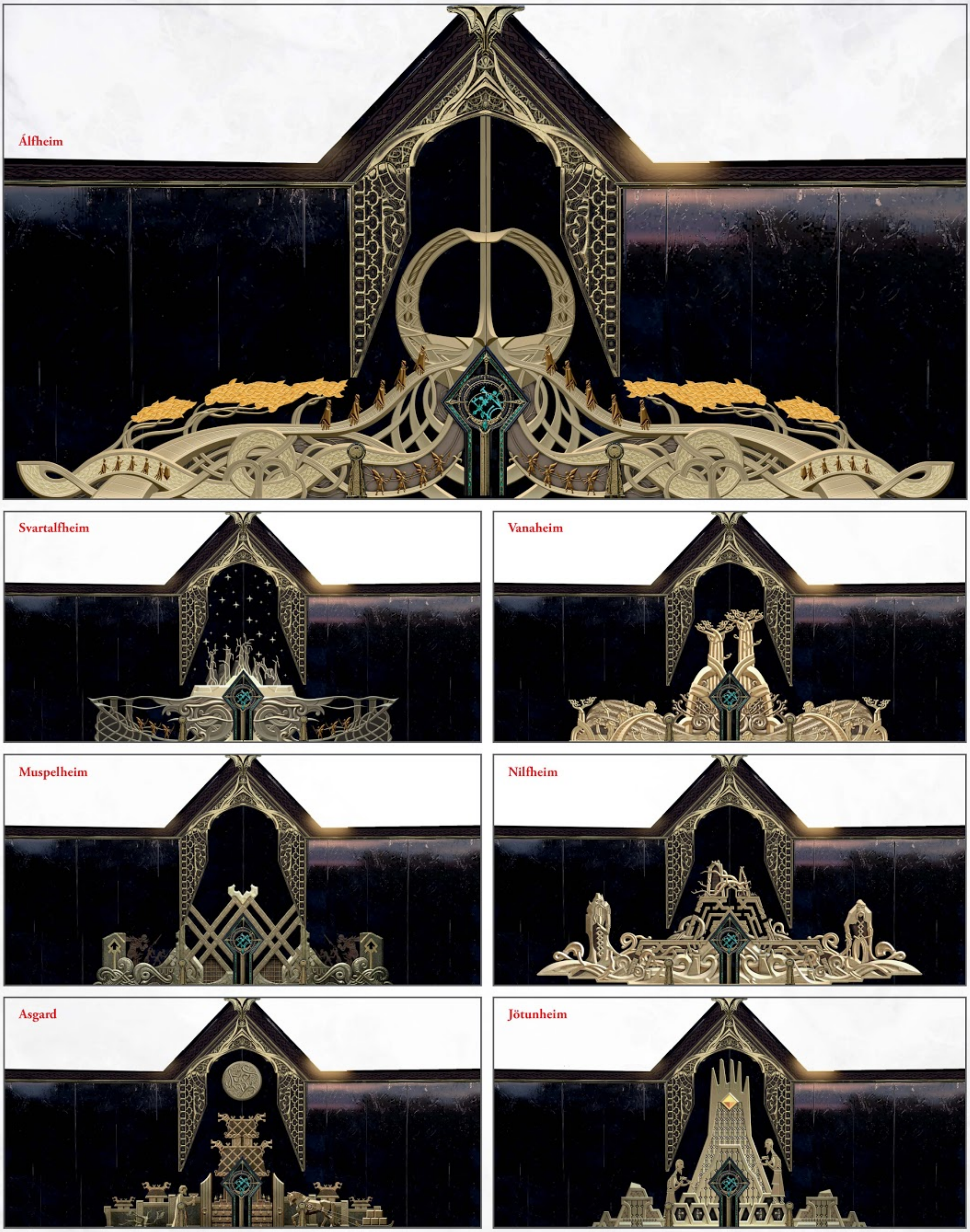


Brok's shop serves as a makeshift method for the player to upgrade gear. The location's design indicates that Brok moved into the space gradually, acquiring each object one at a time while slowly settling in and making it his own. During conversations about the purpose the room would have originally served in the temple, it was determined that Týr used the space as a common room while he ventured out through the realms.

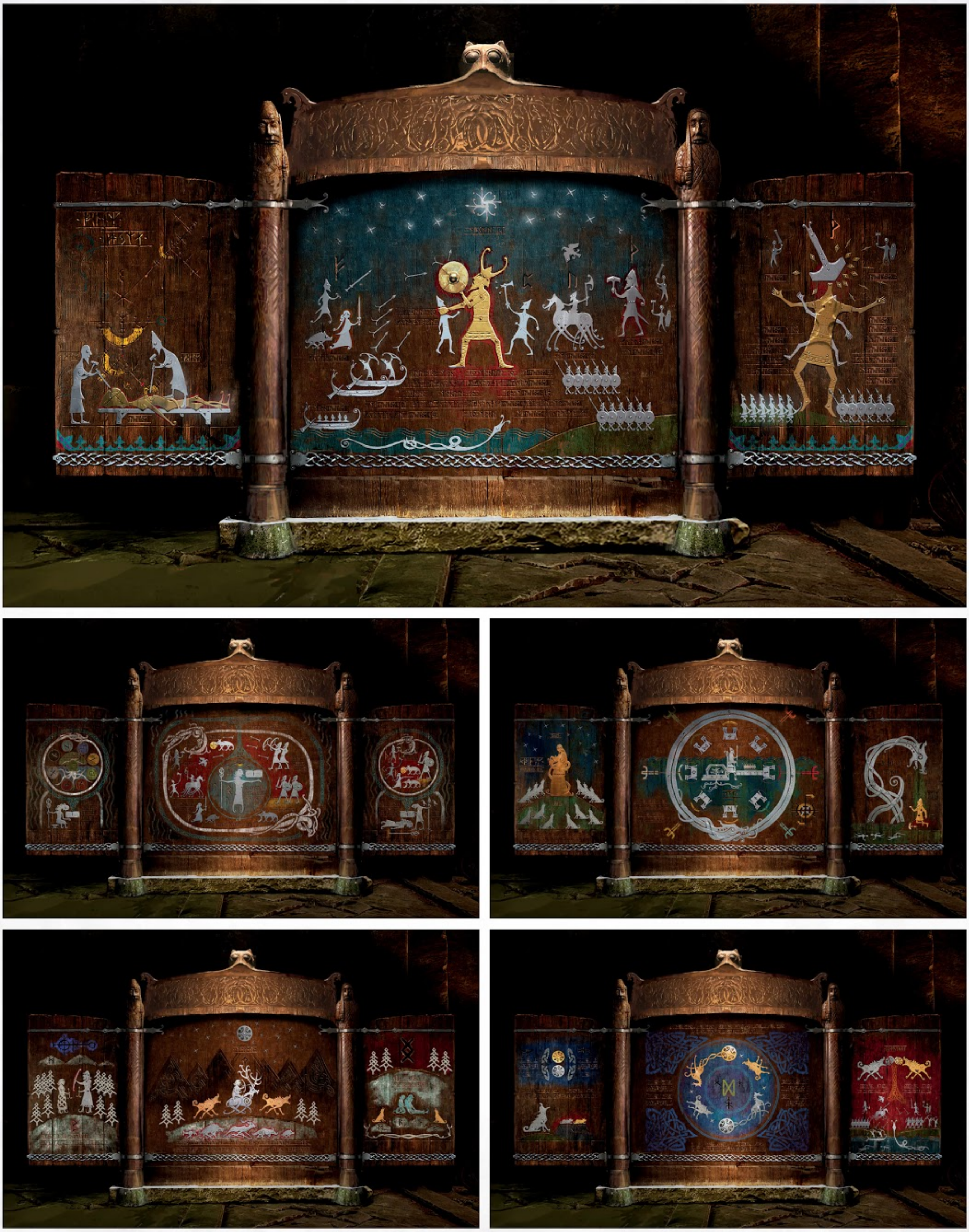
The series of doors surrounding the interior of the realm travel room was an integral feature of the location. Each door features a preview of the realm to which it's connected, which was born of the team's desire to make each portal immediately recognizable. Even though the player isn't able to visit every one of these realms over the course of the game, the inclusion of extra doors helps to build the world beyond what is accessible.



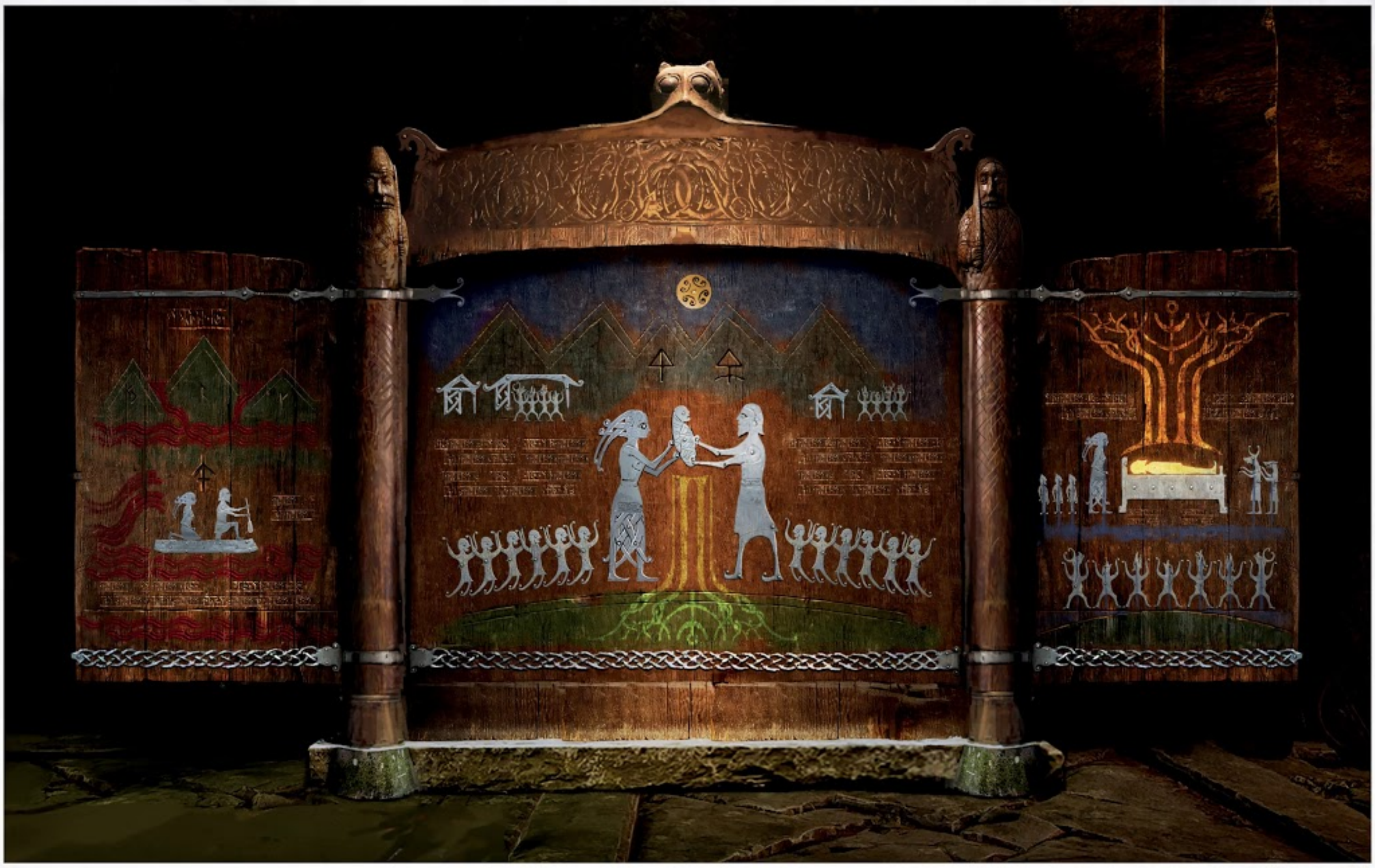
Brok's shop in Týr's temple. Artist: Abe Taraky

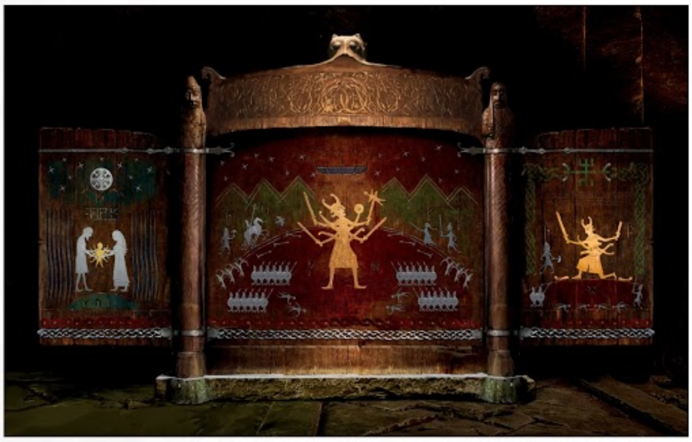

Álfheim
Svartalfheim
Vanaheim
Muspelheim
Nilfheim
Asgard
Jötunheim

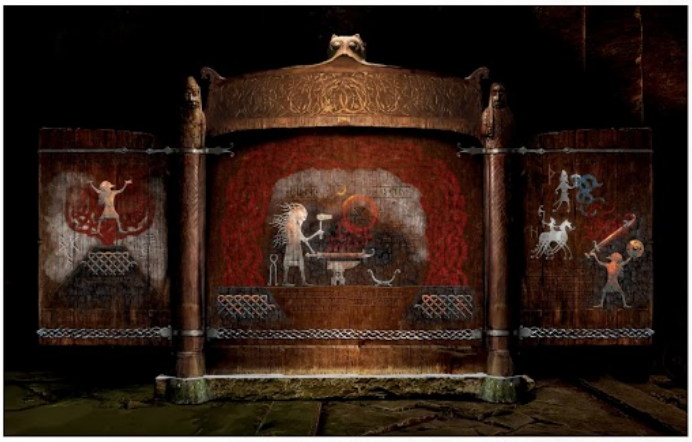
The doors to the realms. Artists: MOOD

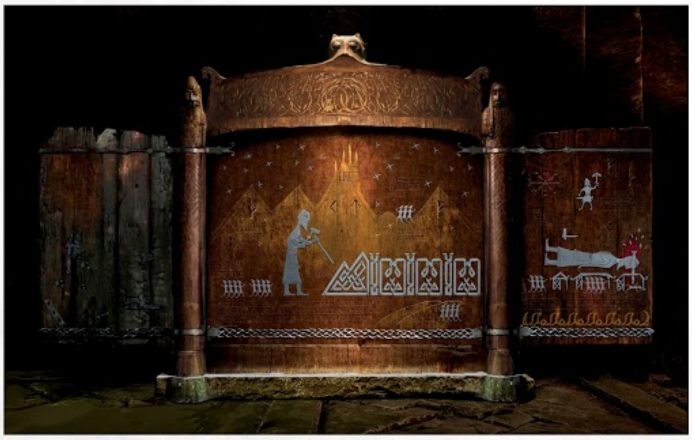


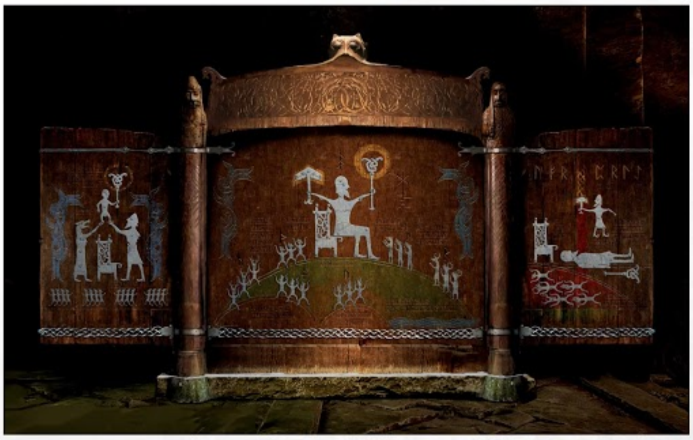
Triptych designs. Artists: José Cabrera, MOOD











Artists: MOOD

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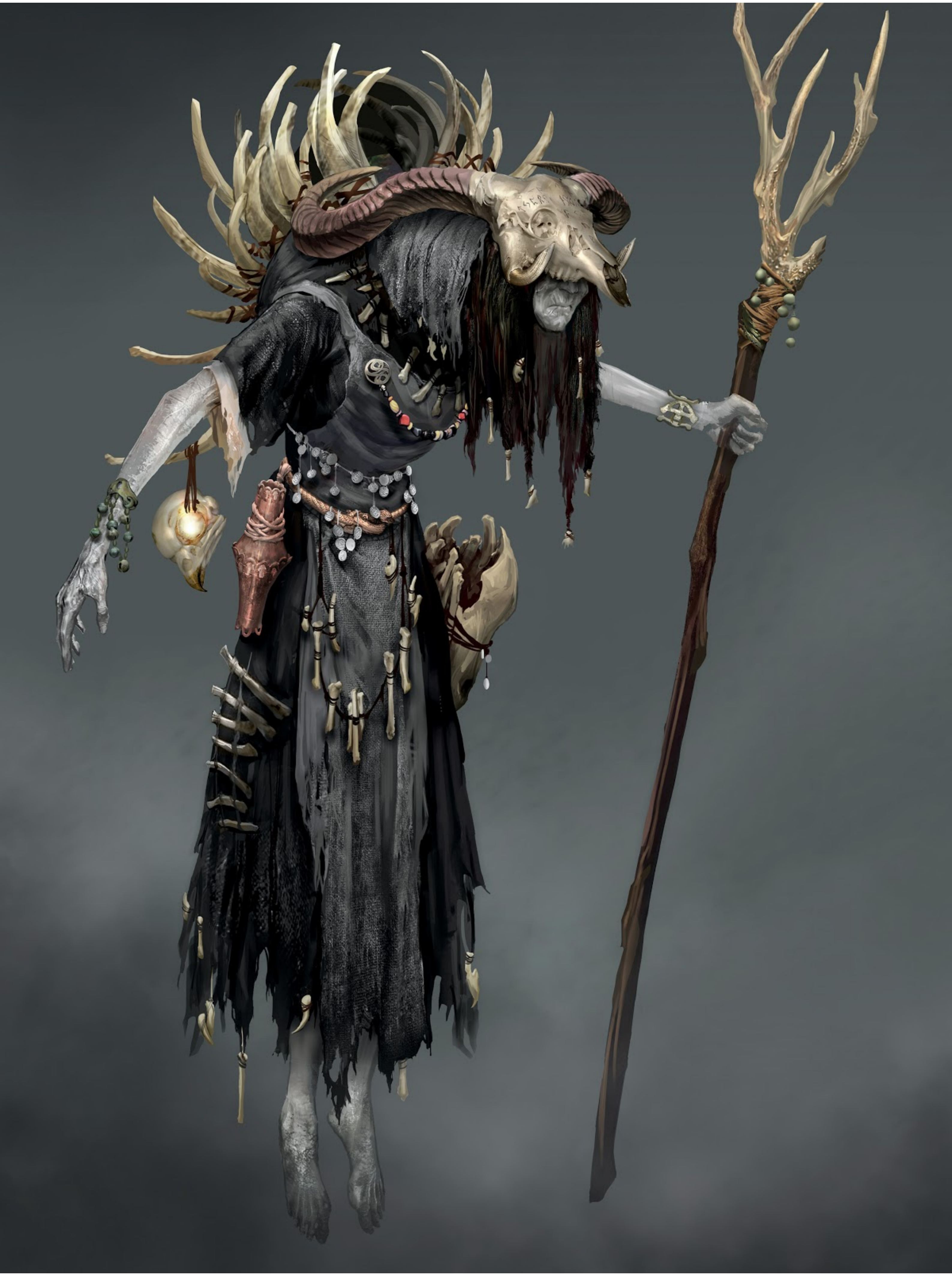
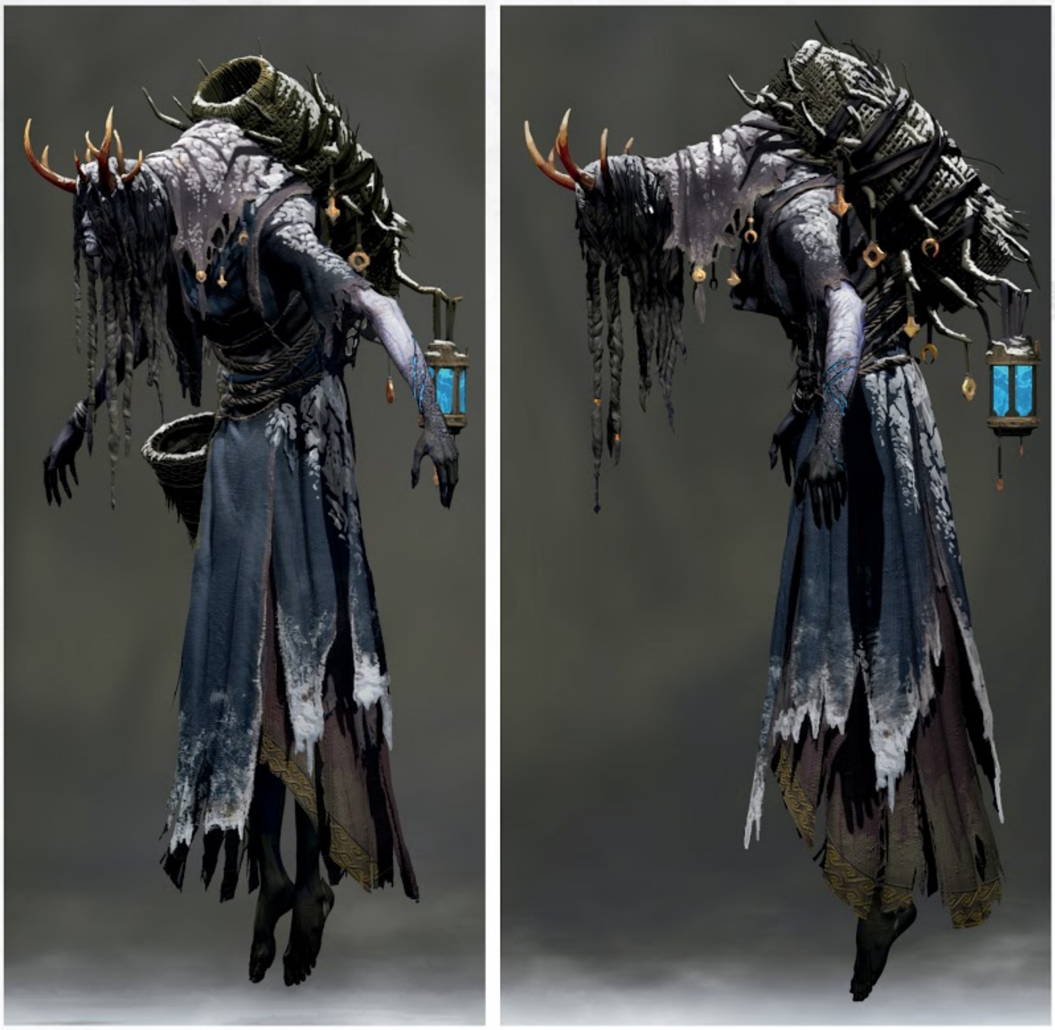
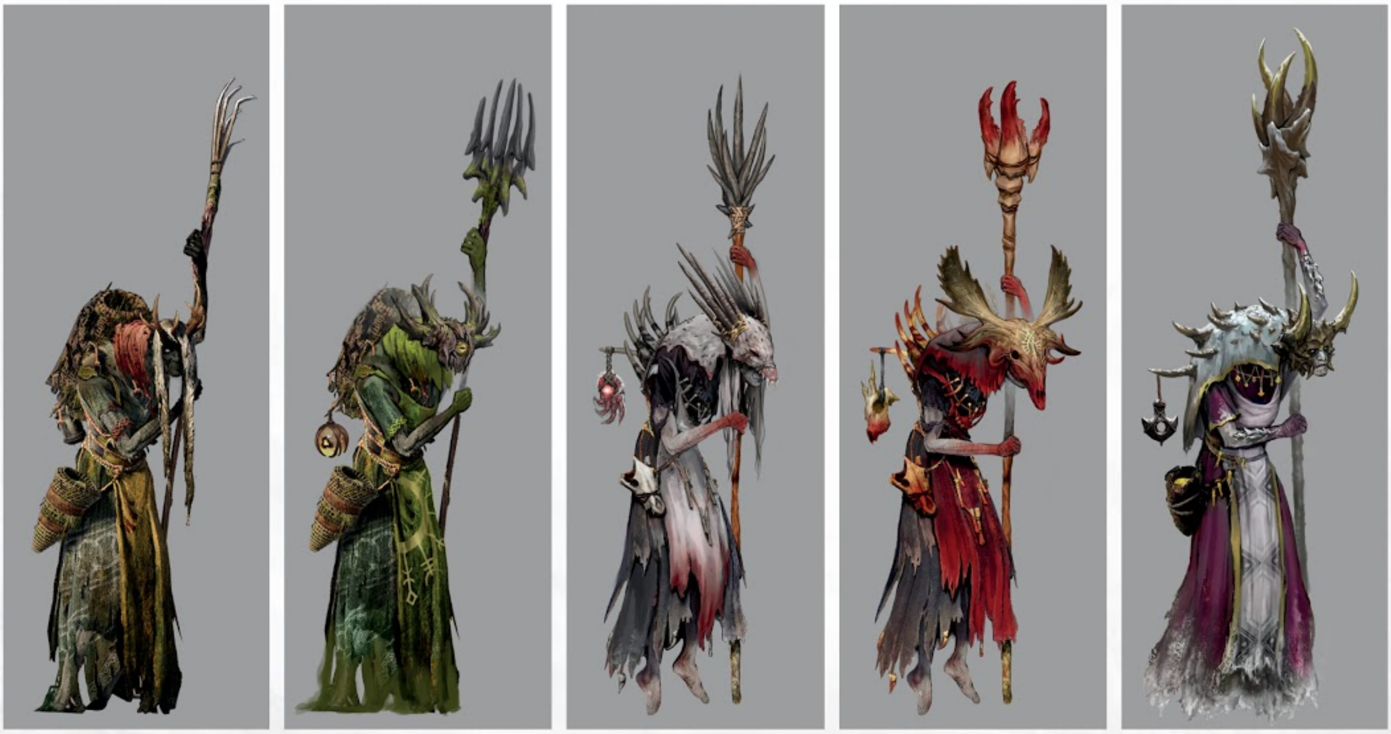




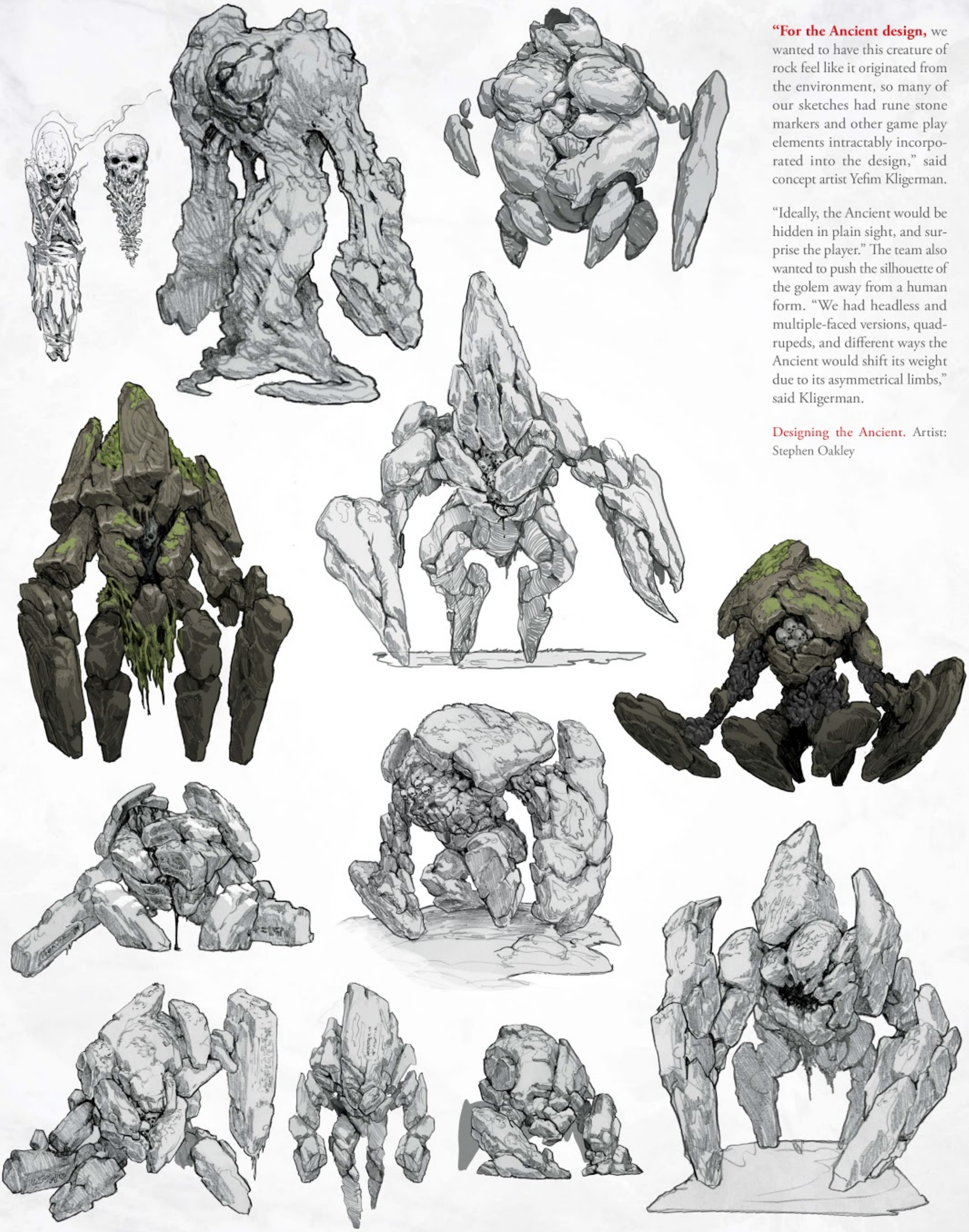
The final Revenant design depicts a character who seemingly floats above the ground and whose anatomy is exaggerated in bizarre ways to create an uneasy feeling for the player. Having arrived at a specific character design, the team is often required to create additional variations on that design for game play needs and visual variety. The goal is for each variation to look unique within a given class, but not so different from the base design that it feels like a completely different enemy class.



Final Revenant designs and game play variations. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Yefim Kligerman (opposite, bottom)

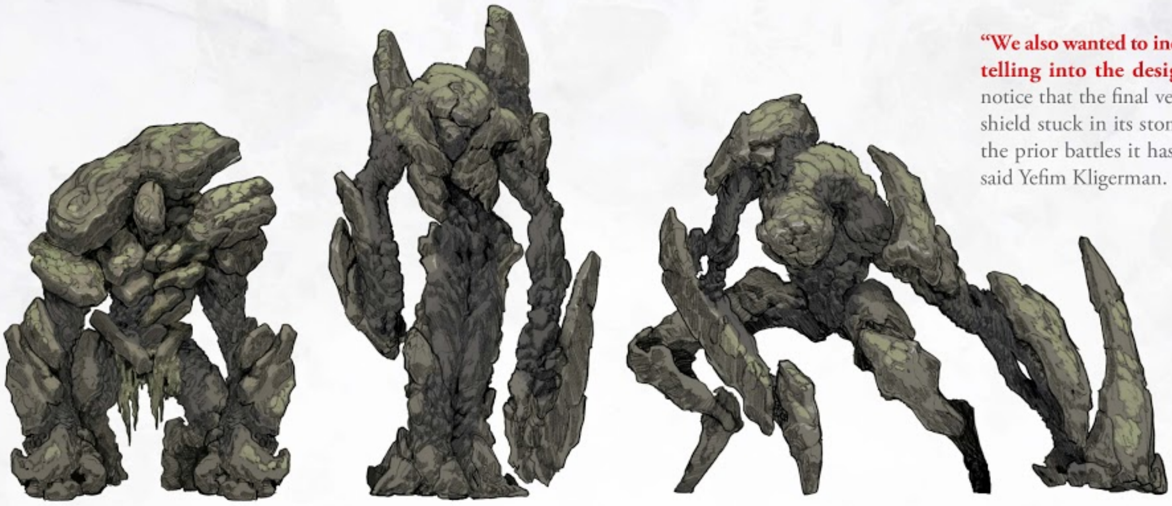
“For the Ancient design, we wanted to have this creature of rock feel like it originated from the environment, so many of our sketches had rune stone markers and other game play elements intractably incorporated into the design,” said concept artist Yefim Kligerman.

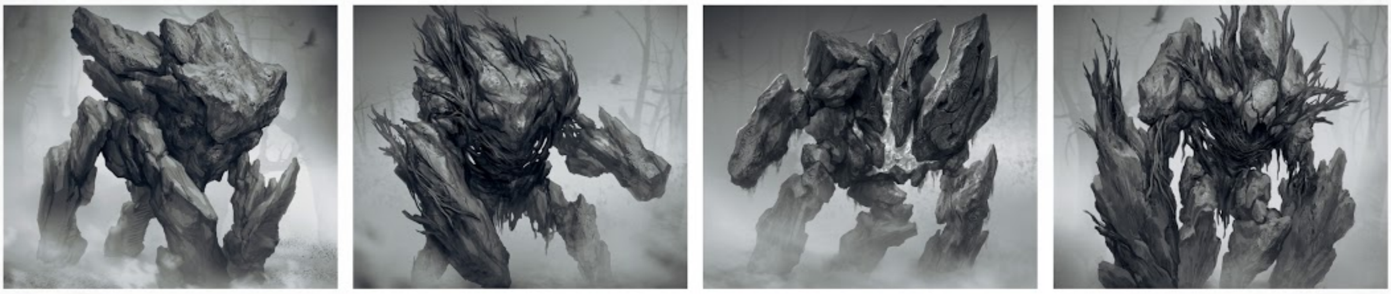
“Ideally, the Ancient would be hidden in plain sight, and surprise the player.” The team also wanted to push the silhouette of the golem away from a human form. “We had headless and multiple-faced versions, quadrupeds, and different ways the Ancient would shift its weight due to its asymmetrical limbs,” said Kligerman.

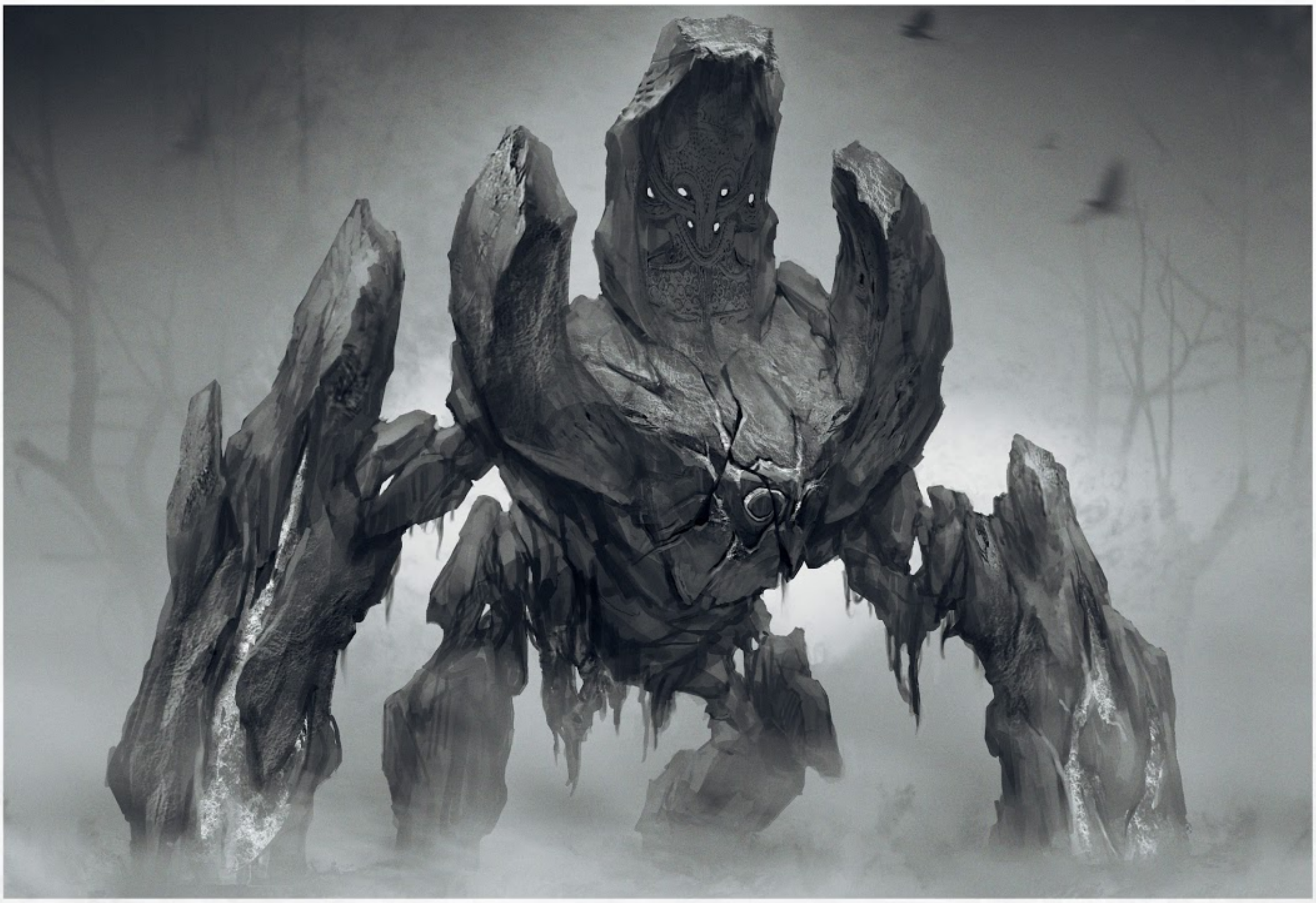


Designing the Ancient. Artist: Stephen Oakley

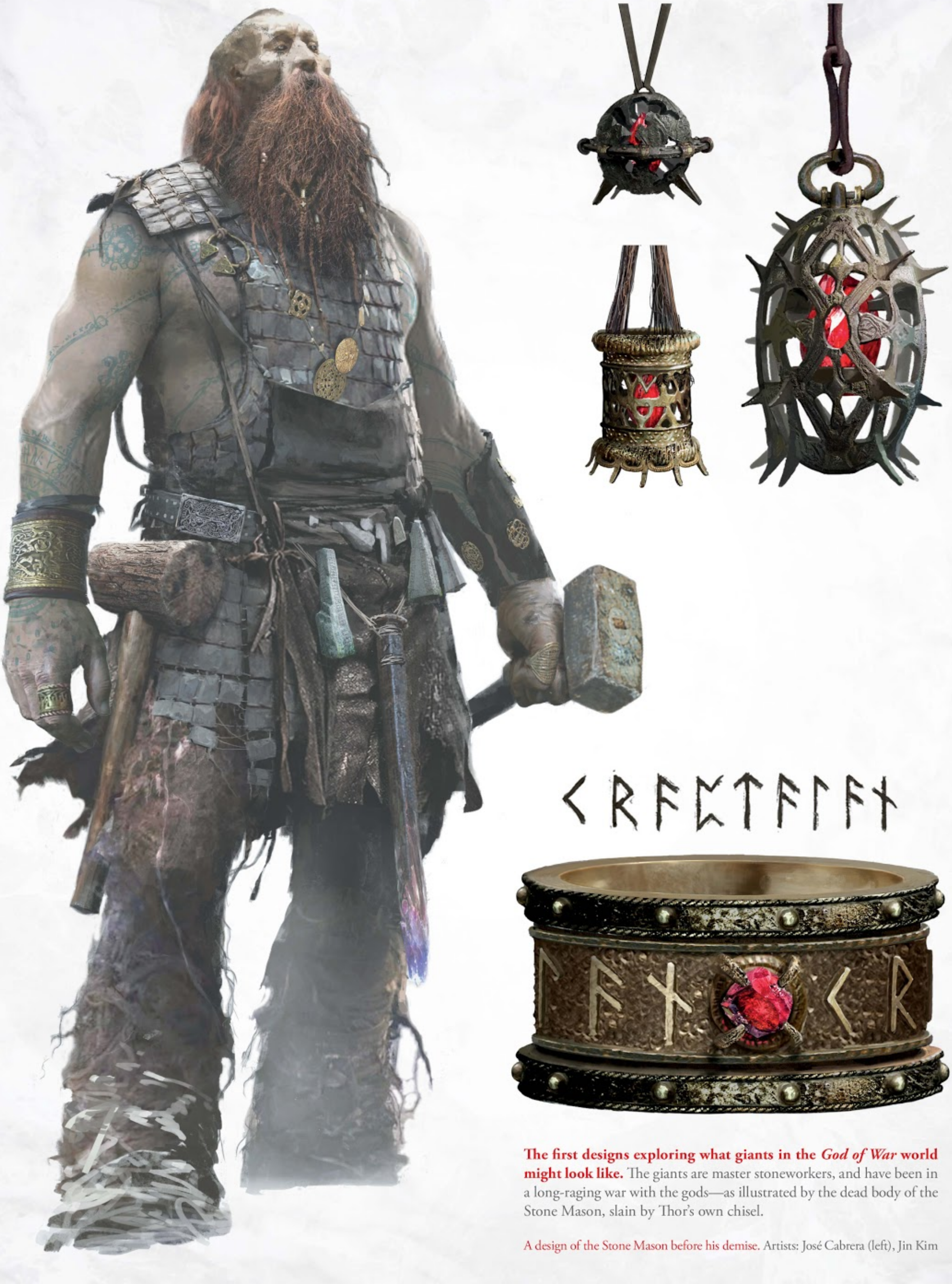
"We also wanted to incorporate some storytelling into the design, so players would notice that the final version has a sword and shield stuck in its stone body, hinting at all the prior battles it has faced and endured," said Yefim Kligerman.





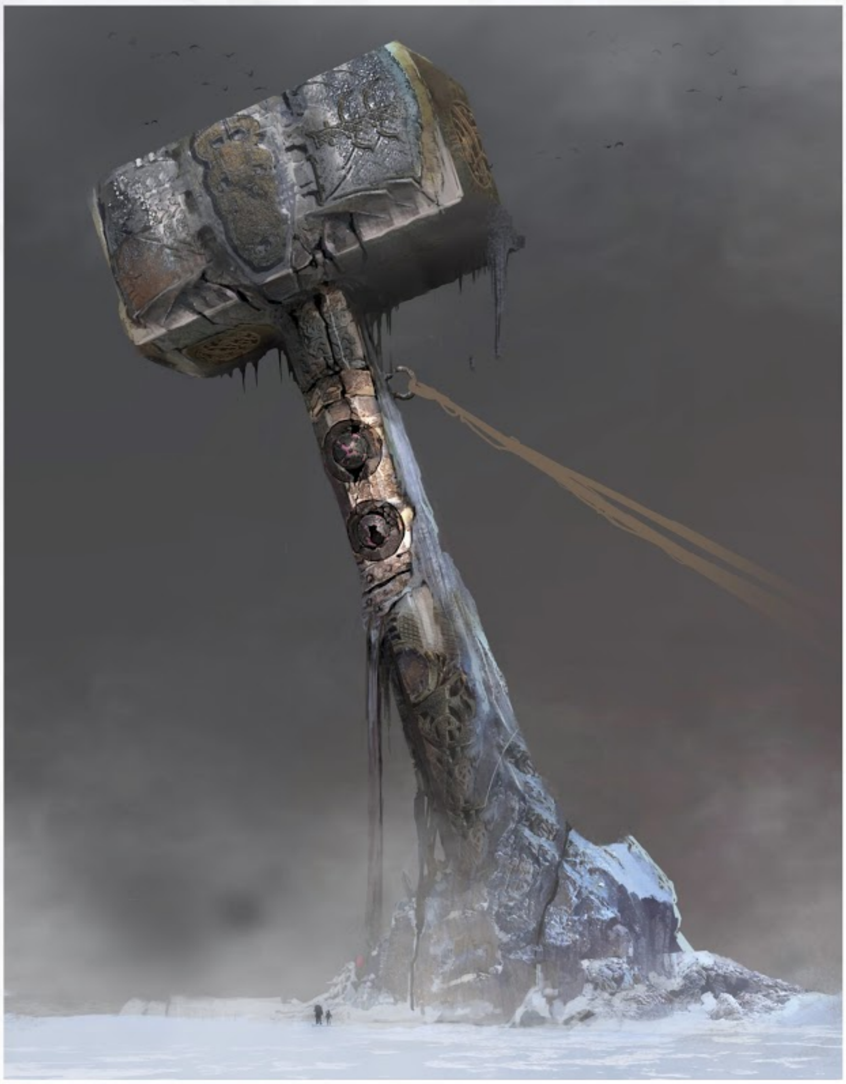


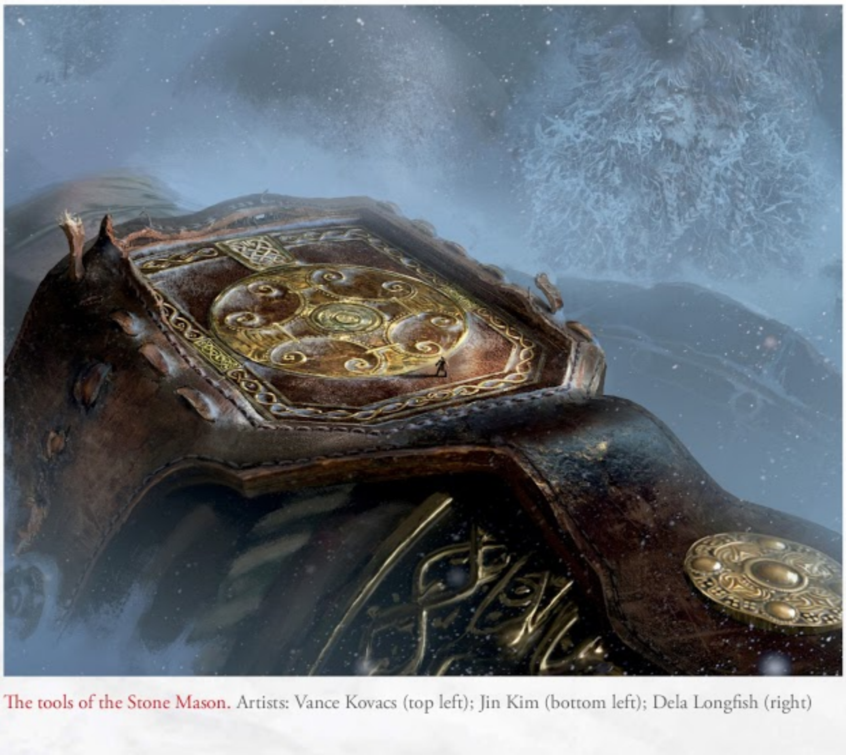
Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Yefim Kligerman (bottom)

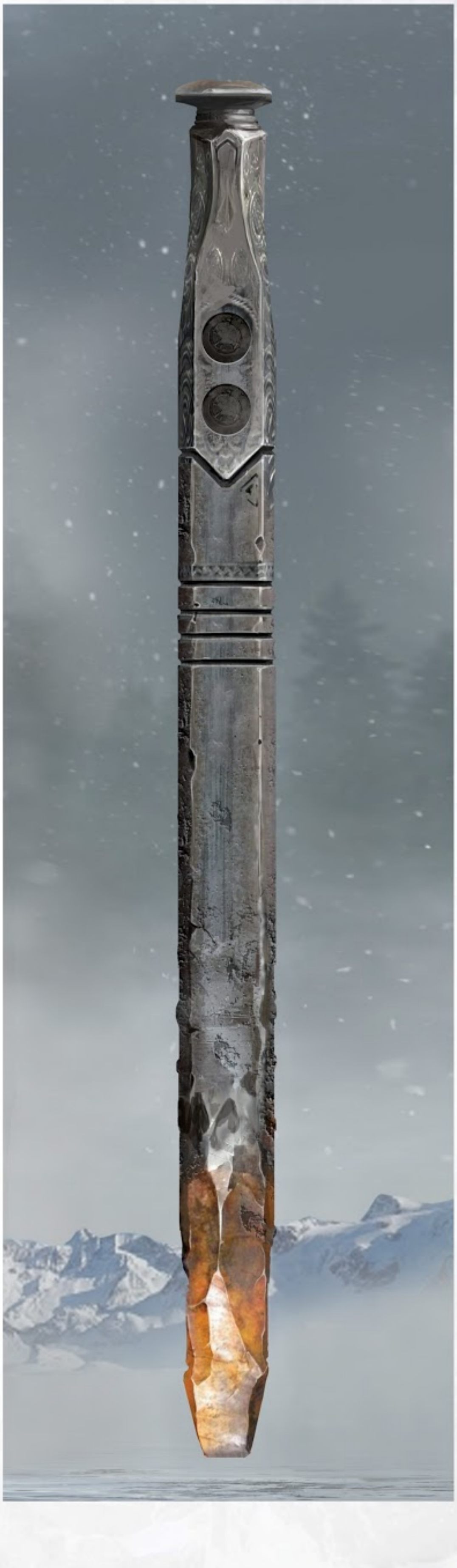


The first designs exploring what giants in the *God of War* world might look like. The giants are master stoneworkers, and have been in a long-raging war with the gods—as illustrated by the dead body of the Stone Mason, slain by Thor's own chisel.

A design of the Stone Mason before his demise. Artists: José Cabrera (left), Jin Kim







The tools of the Stone Mason. Artists: Vance Kovacs (top left); Jin Kim (bottom left); Dela Longfish (right)

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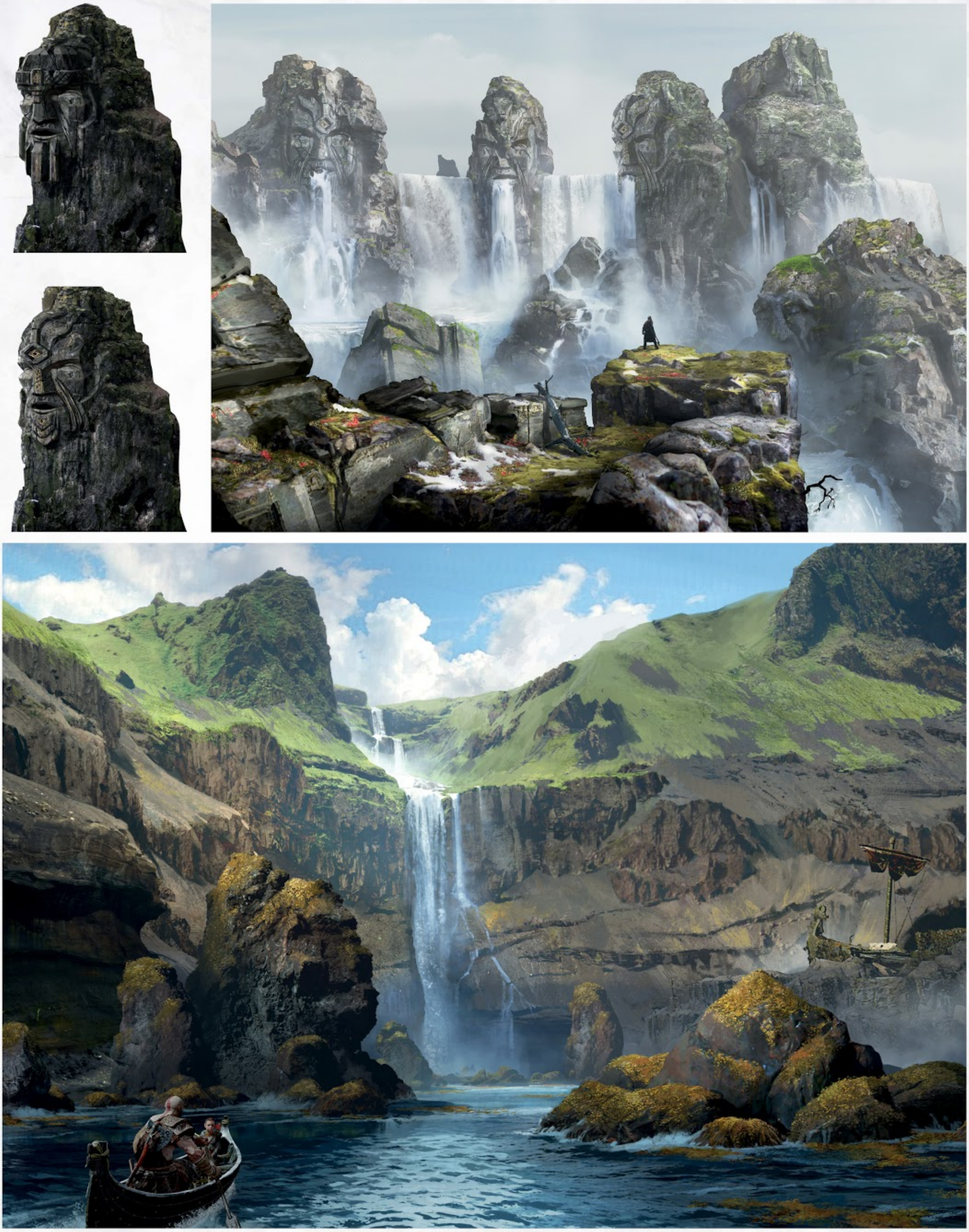
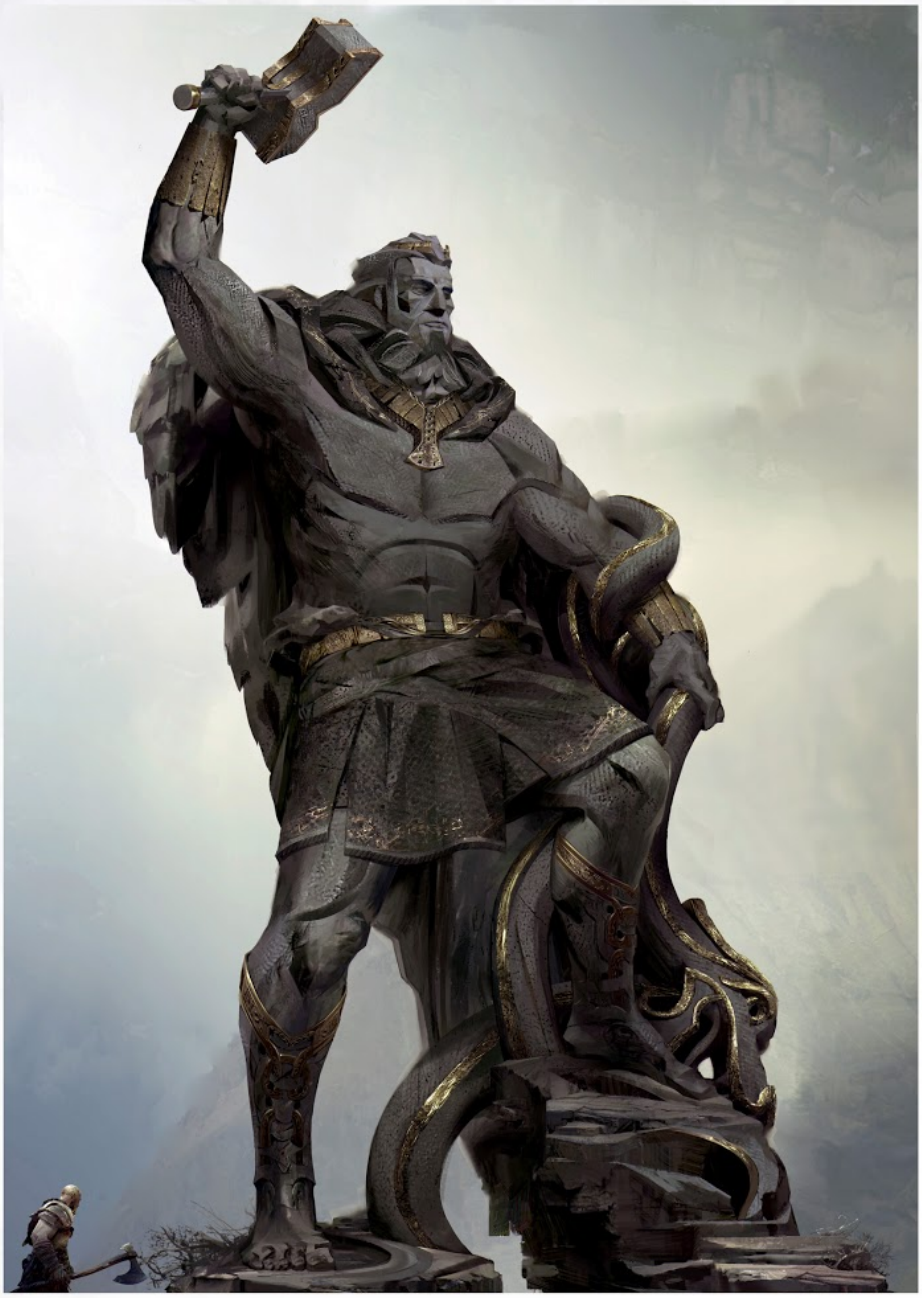
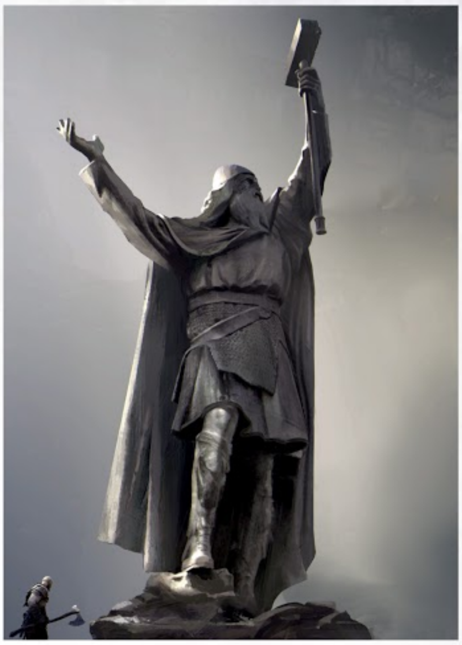
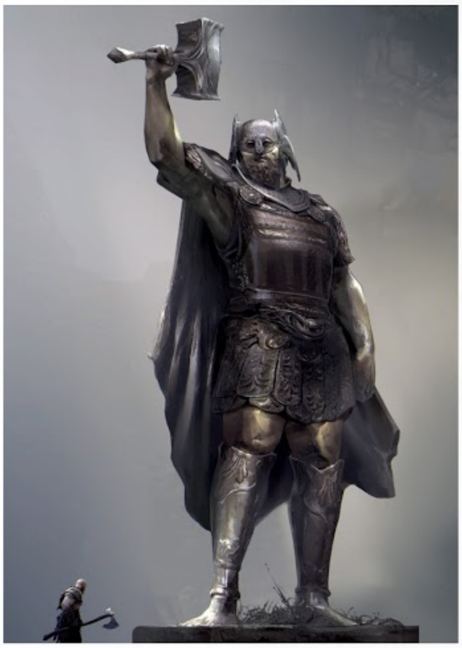
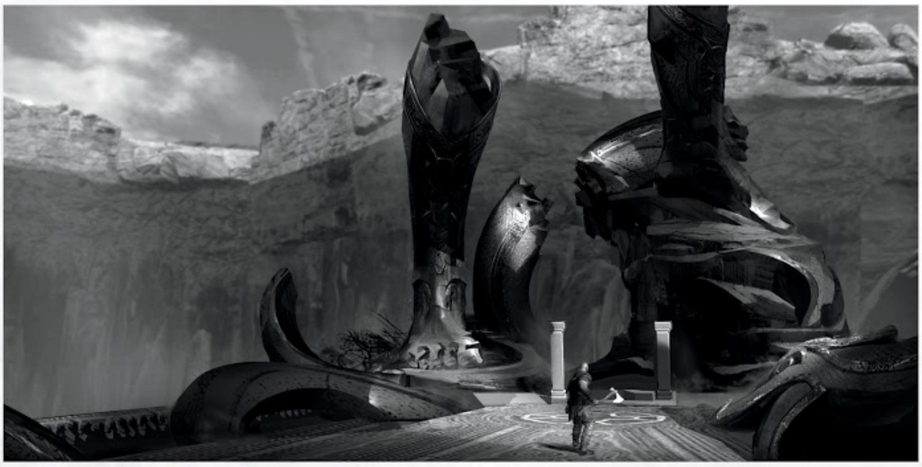


The Mason Trail and shoreline exploration. Artists: MOOD (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)





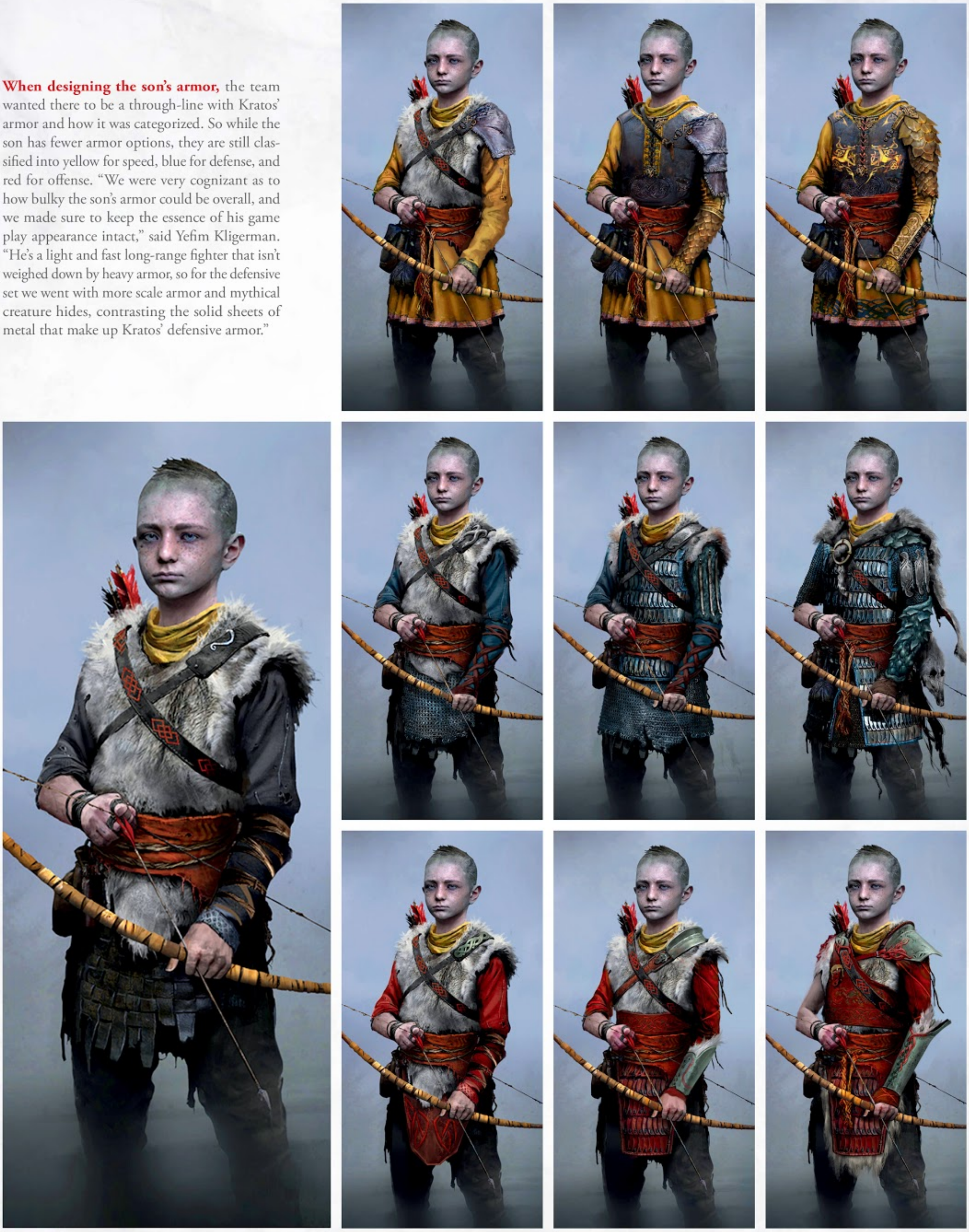




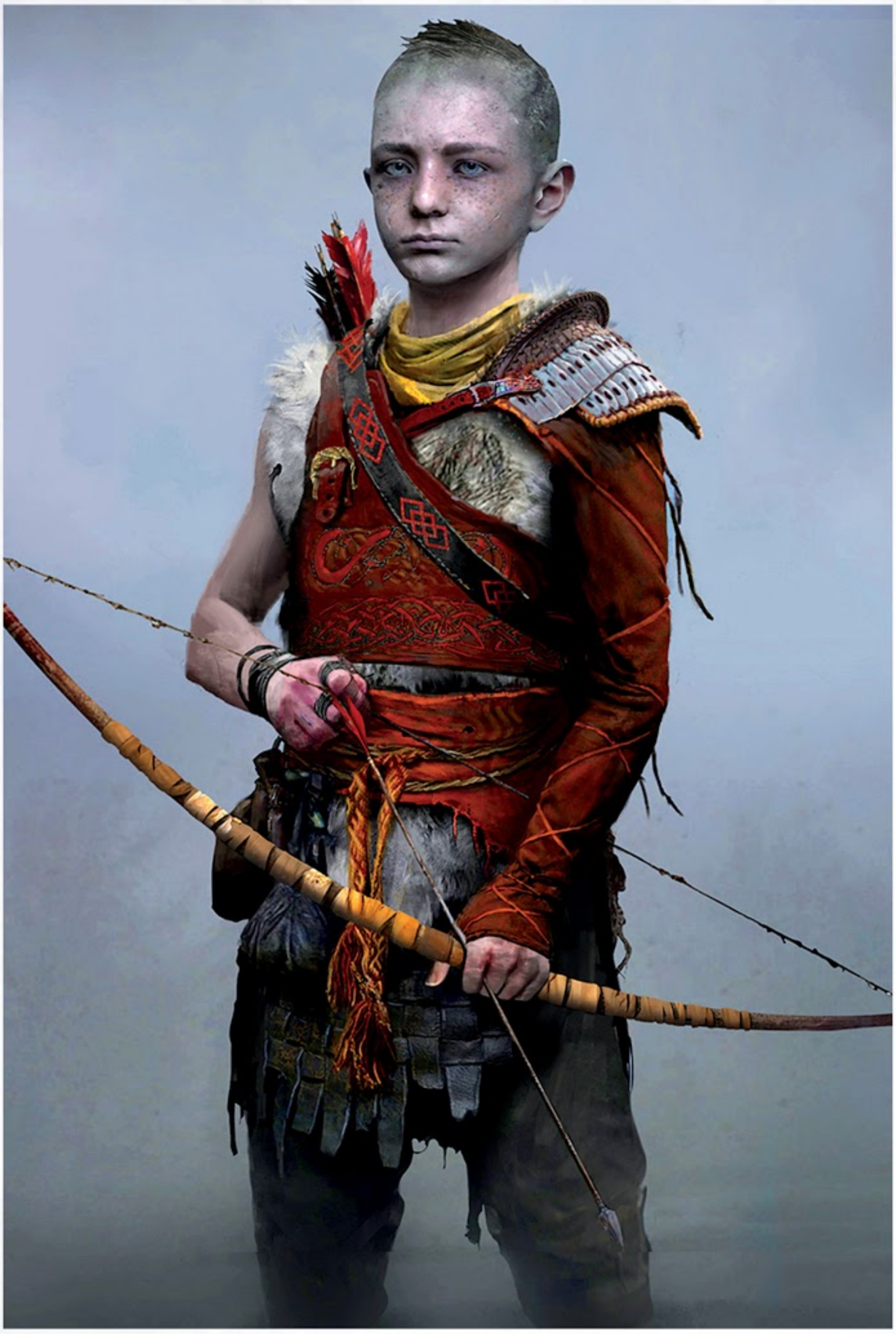
Shrine of Thor. Artist: Abe Taraky

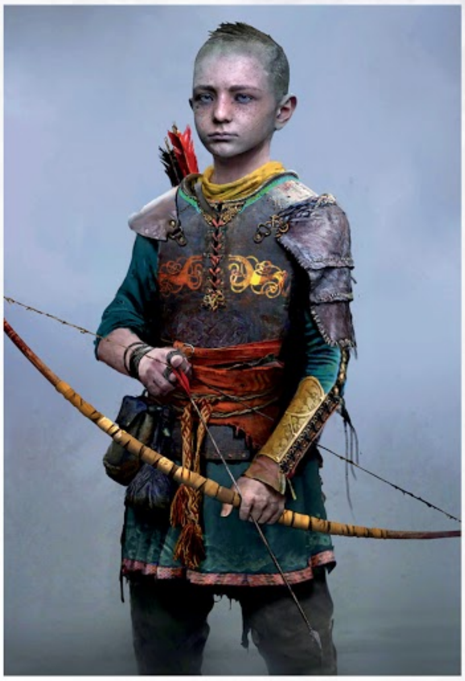
Thor's statue offered an opportunity to add a point of interest to the Lake of Nine, while also demonstrating Thor's character, as the titanic statue lords over Týr's temple. The original concept featured only the feet of the statue—the World Serpent having already consumed the top half, which would have been encountered by the player at a later point. The team was concerned that players would miss the connection between the statue and its disembodied feet, and decided that the image of the World Serpent devouring the statue was too exciting to pass up. That moment is now featured in the game.

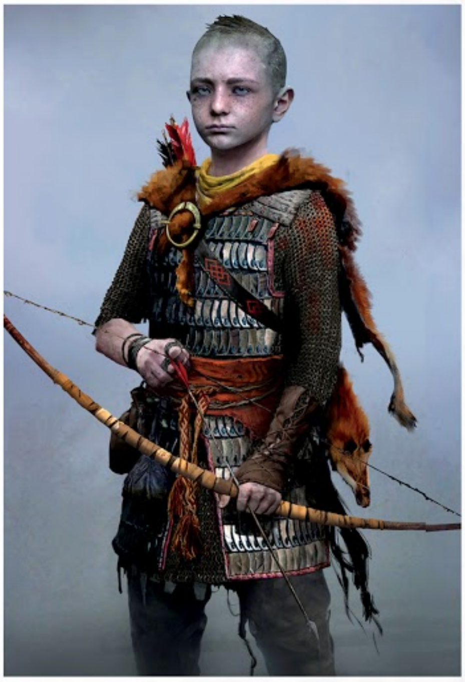
When designing the son's armor, the team wanted there to be a through-line with Kratos' armor and how it was categorized. So while the son has fewer armor options, they are still classified into yellow for speed, blue for defense, and red for offense. "We were very cognizant as to how bulky the son's armor could be overall, and we made sure to keep the essence of his game play appearance intact," said Yefim Kligerman. "He's a light and fast long-range fighter that isn't weighed down by heavy armor, so for the defensive set we went with more scale armor and mythical creature hides, contrasting the solid sheets of metal that make up Kratos' defensive armor."

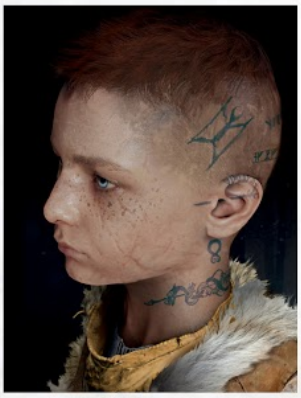


Atreus' costume explorations. Artist: José Cabrera





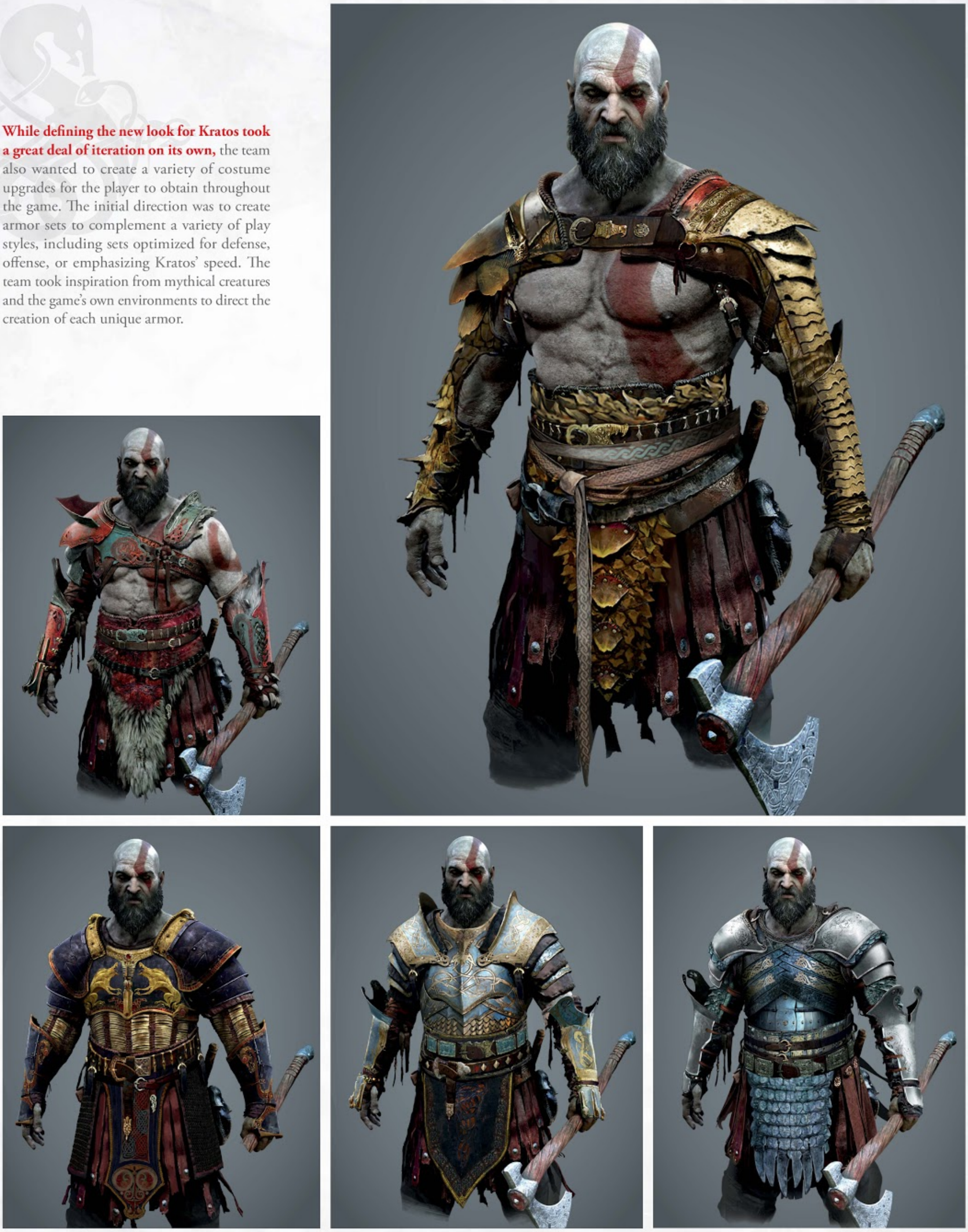




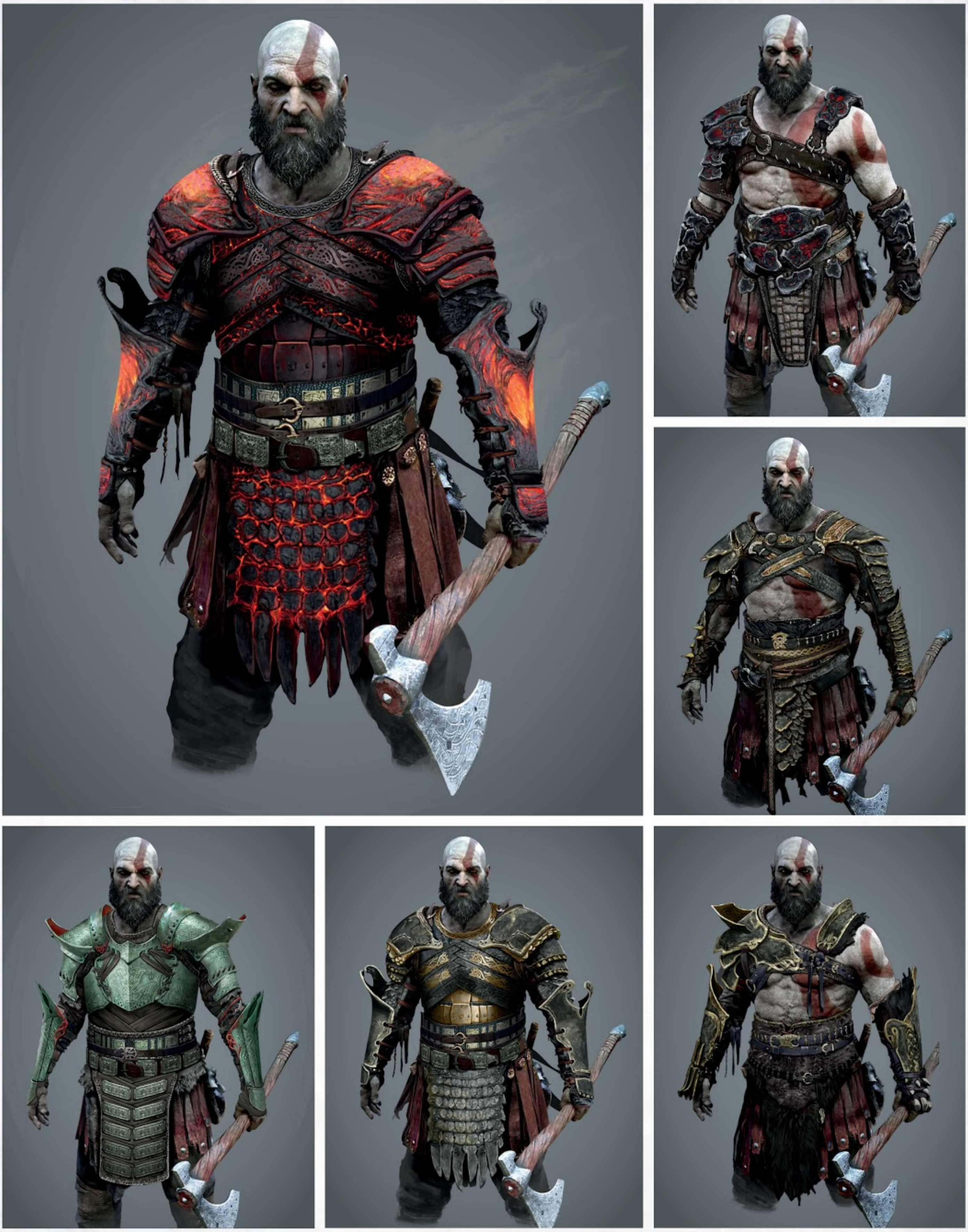
Artist: José Cabrera

For the son's offensive armor set, the concept was to focus on the mechanics of firing an arrow effectively. To that end, the sleeve was removed from Atreus' firing arm, and a guard was added to the other. "The colors and materials used for this set match Kratos' offensive armor, while catering specifically to archery and not melee combat," said Kligerman. "We pushed the speed set in a more mythological direction, with the addition of enchanted leather and metal."

While defining the new look for Kratos took a great deal of iteration on its own, the team also wanted to create a variety of costume upgrades for the player to obtain throughout the game. The initial direction was to create armor sets to complement a variety of play styles, including sets optimized for defense, offense, or emphasizing Kratos' speed. The team took inspiration from mythical creatures and the game's own environments to direct the creation of each unique armor.

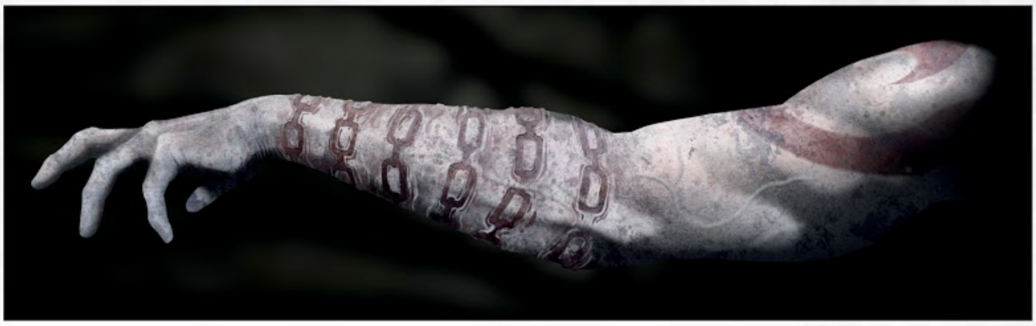


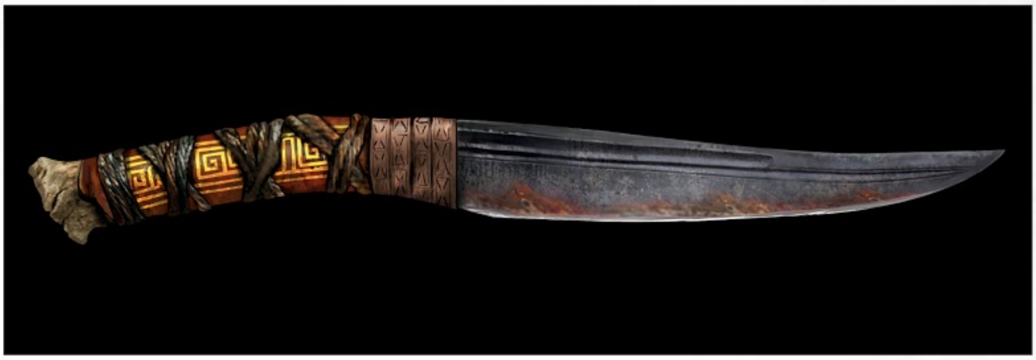
Kratos' costume explorations. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (bottom right); José Cabrera

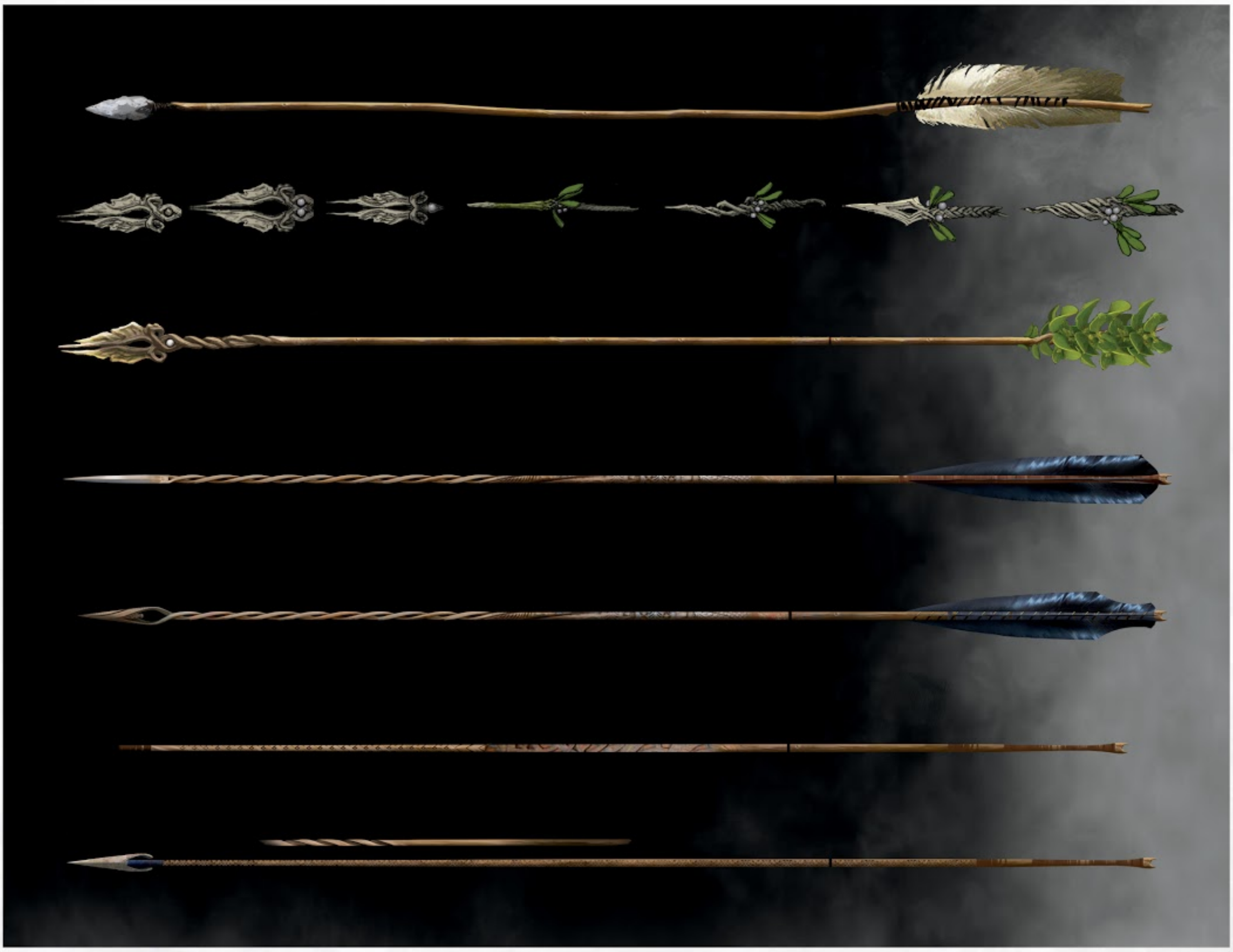


Artists: Stephen Oakley (top left, top right, bottom middle, bottom right); Yefim Kligerman (bottom left); José Cabrera (middle right)

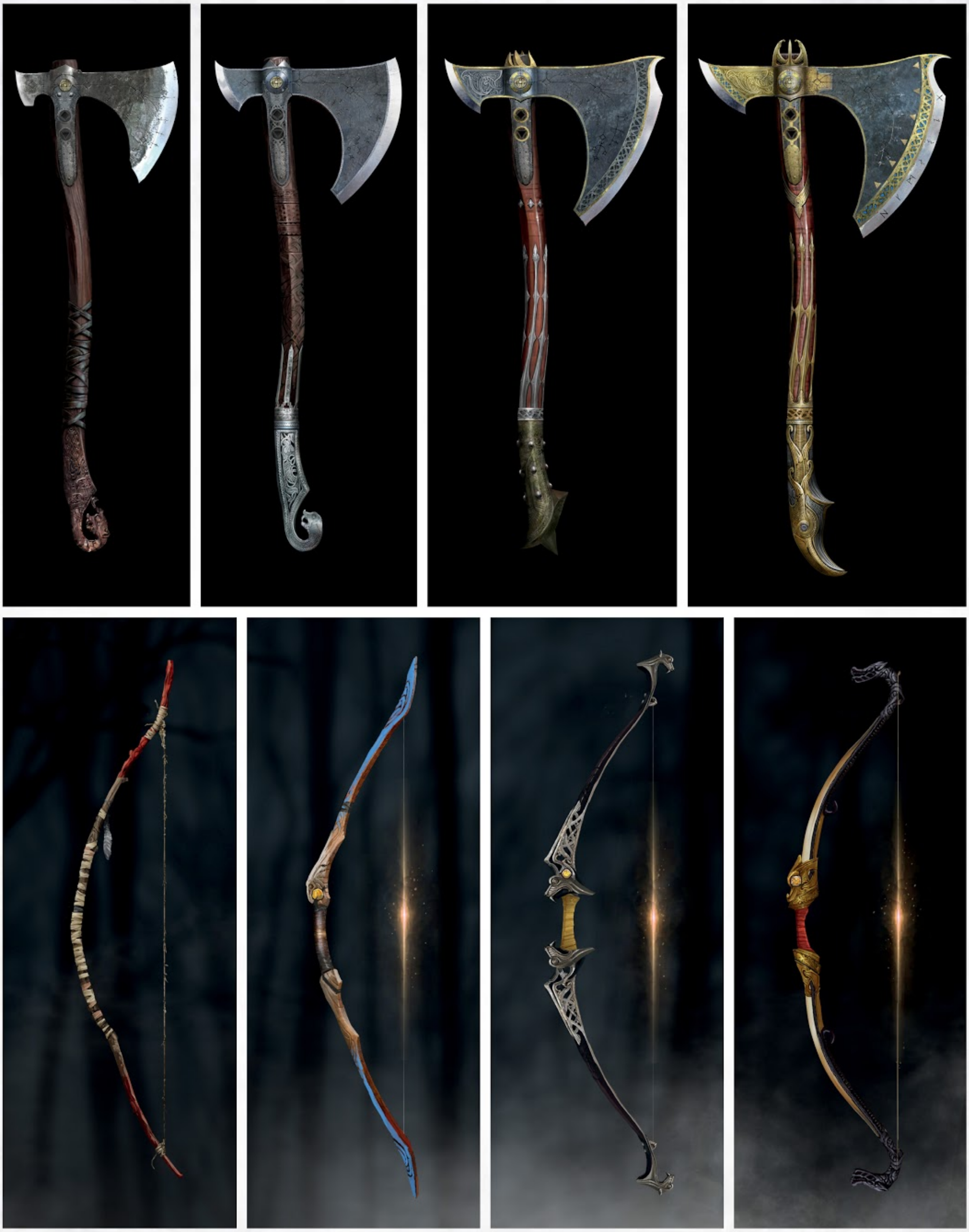
“Designing the main cast of characters is the first thing one thinks about on a project like this, but we also aim to give that same attention to detail to anything we have to design—no matter how small,” said Dela Longfish. “Whether it’s Atreus’ arrows, Kratos’ knife, or the chain scars that remain covered, our hope is that this attention to detail adds depth to all the elements within the world, making them all more believable.”





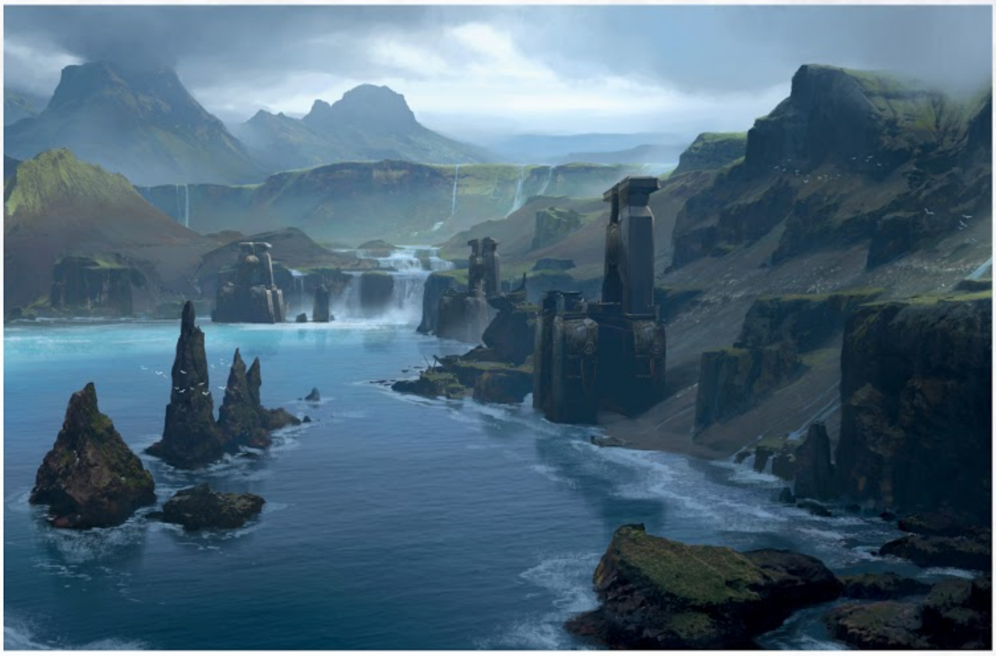


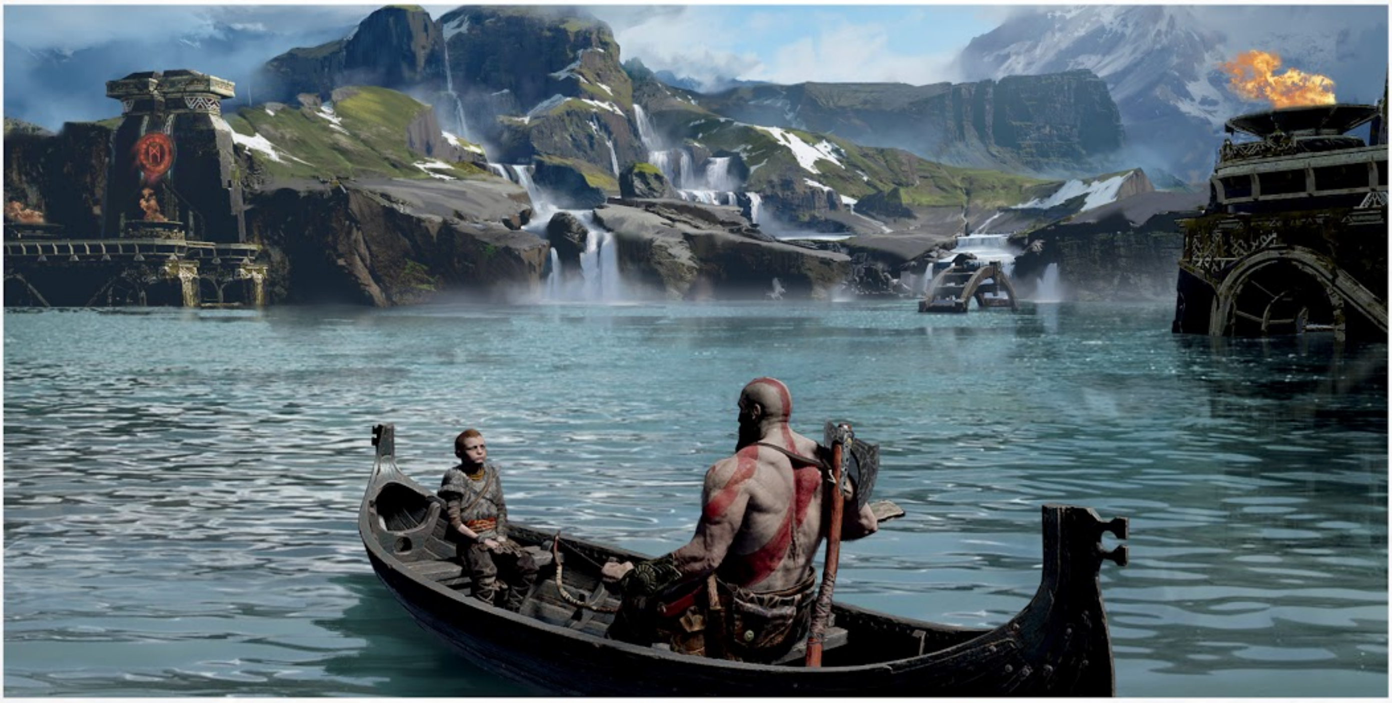
Weapons of the world. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (middle); Stephen Oakley (bottom); Dela Longfish (top)

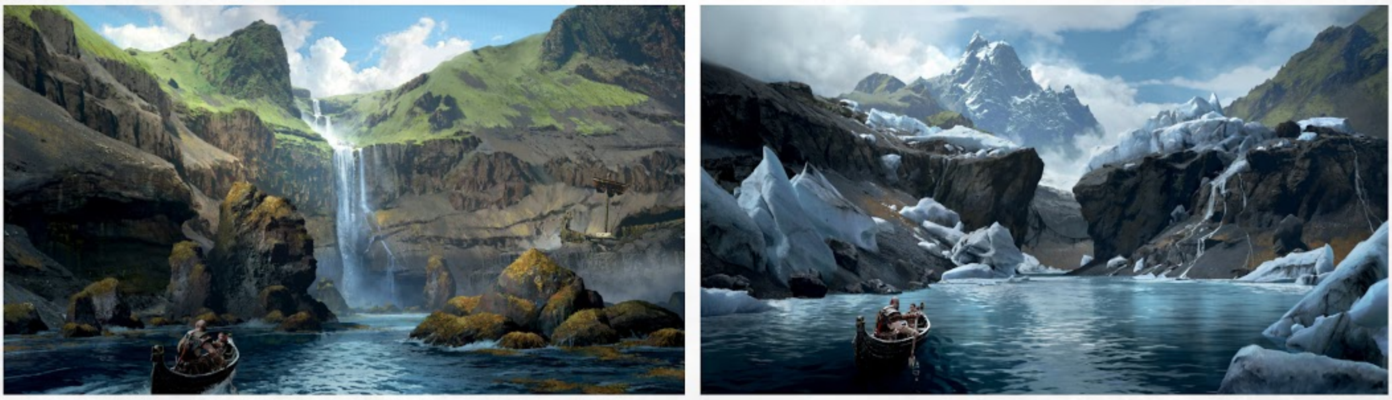


Final progression for the Leviathan Axe and the bow. Artists: Dela Longfish, Yefim Kligerman (top); Stephen Oakley (bottom)

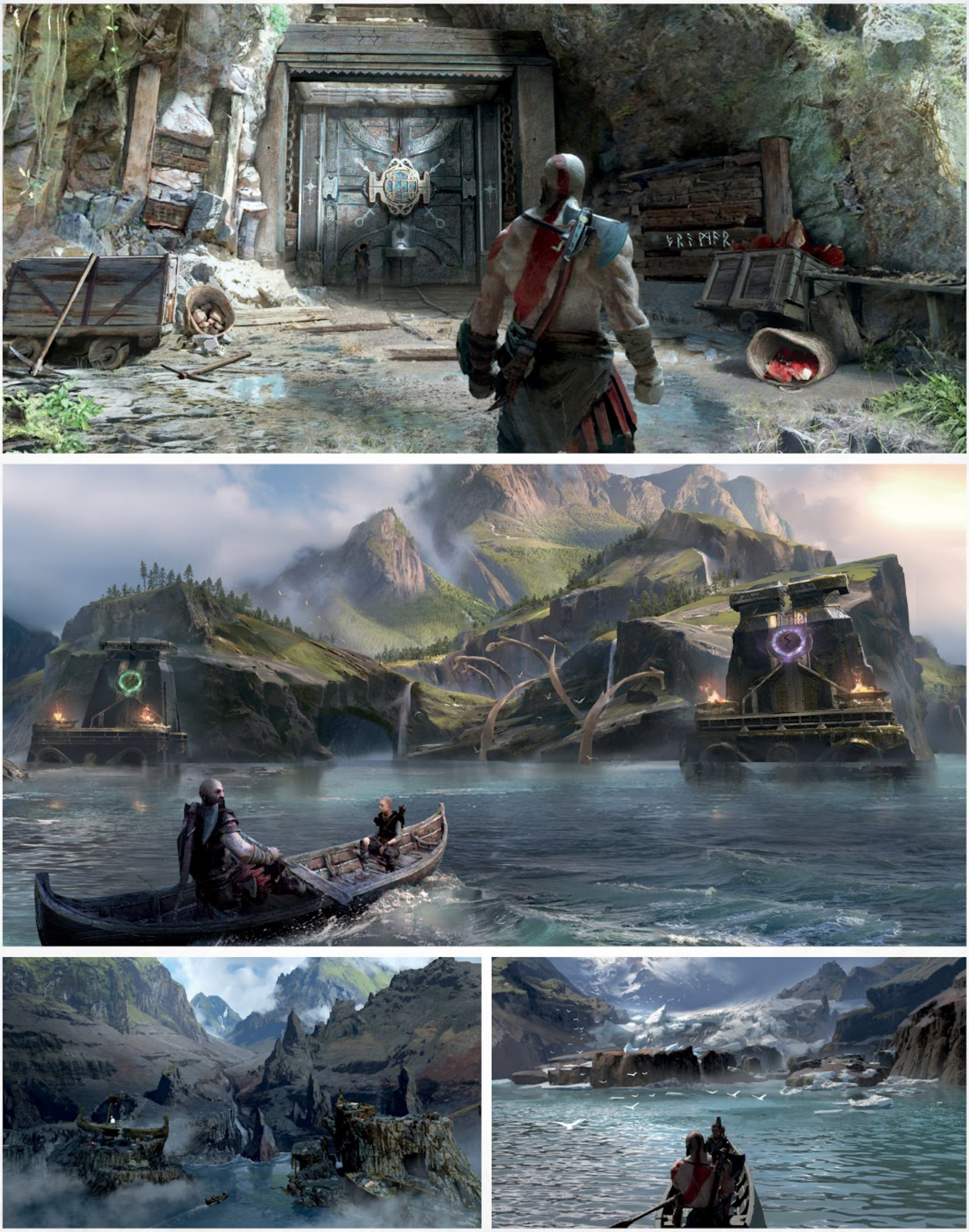
"All rivers flow to the sea, or at least to the Lake of Nine in Midgard," says John Palamarchuk. "The lake connects all the realms and hidden areas of the world. Due to its vast size, the art team spent considerable time distinguishing different areas to help orient the player. Areas are marked with grand monuments like statues, waterfalls, shipwrecks, and a glacier. The first visit to the lake symbolizes that breath of fresh air and expansiveness that one feels on the open water, giving the player a much grander experience while exploring the world."



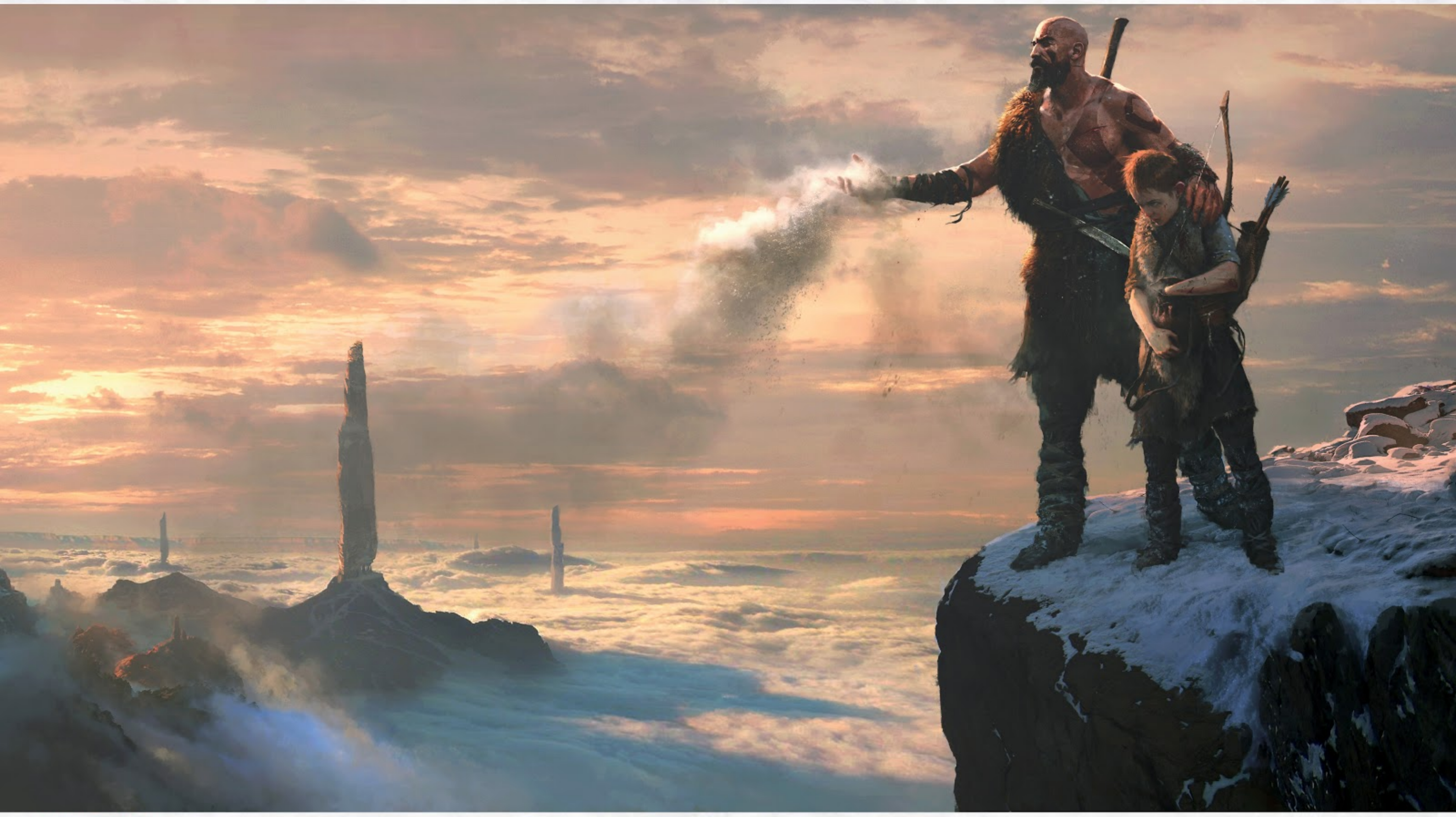




The Lake of Nine's shoreline. Artists: Luke Berliner (middle); Mark Castanon



Artists: Jin Kim (top); Abe Taraky (middle); Mark Castanon (bottom left); Luke Berliner (bottom right)



Father and son—a wondrous journey. Artist: José Cabrera

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